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ABRAHAM LINCOLN
AND THE SLEEPING SENTINEL
OF VERMONT

WILLIAM SCOTT

From an old Daguerreotype
in the possession of Stephen Welch, Esq.

BY WALDO F. GLOVER

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

AND THE

SLEEPING SENTINEL

OF

VERMONT

ILLUSTRATED WITH A DAGUERREOTYPE, DOCUMENTS, AND WOOD-ENGRAVINGS OF THE PERIOD

MONTPELIER:
THE VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MCMXXXVI

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Designed by Vrest Orton

To the Memory of
My Father and Mother:

HENRY CLAY GLOVER
1846-1927

NANCY JACKSON GLOVER
1850-1935

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Head Quarters, Army of the Potomac,

Washington, September 4th, 1861

General Orders.
No. 6.

At the General Court Martial which convened at the Camp of Brigadier General Smiths Brigade pursuant to Special Orders No. 23, of September 2d 1861, from the Head Quarters of the Army of the Potomac, and of which Colonel B.H. Hyde, 3rd Vermont Volunteers is President, was arraigned and tried Private William Scott of Company "K", 3rd Vermont Volunteers, upon the following charge and Specification -

Charge

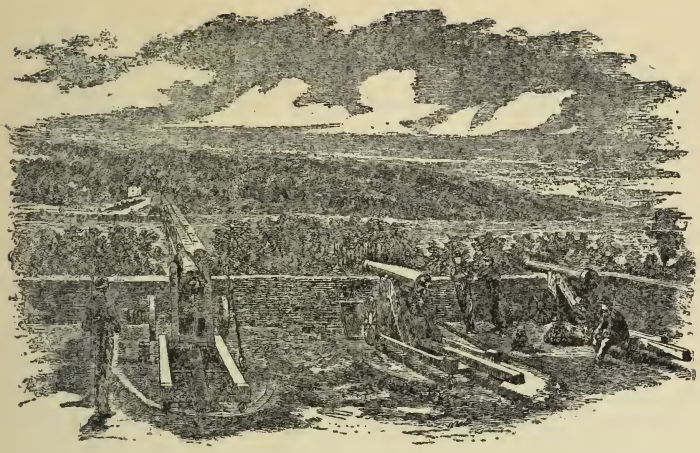
"Violation of the 46th Article of War"

Specification - "In this, that he, Private William Scott, Company "K" 3rd Vermont Volunteers, being a regularly posted sentinel did go to sleep upon his post; this at the hour between three and four A.M. on the 31st day of August 1861. While on picket guard, near Camp Lyon. D.C."

To which charge and Specification the accused pleaded as follows:

Death Warrant of the Court Martial
(Only First Sheet Reproduced)

Photostat of Death Warrant furnished by Miss Mabel Shields, Fairbank's Museum, St. Johnsbury.



INTRODUCTION

Can anything new or interesting be written on the subject of Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel? That is a question which any person who glances at the title of this little book is perfectly justified in asking. Indeed, there have been few incidents of minor importance connected with the career of President Lincoln, which have been more generally featured, both by historians of the Civil War, and by writers of Lincoln biography, than the pardon of William Scott, the Vermont soldier, who was condemned to death for sleeping on his post while on guard duty. Moreover, almost every reader will recall with what vigor and bitterness this subject was discussed in a newspaper controversy which came to a

climax in the late summer and early autumn of 1926, or about a year subsequent to the publication of Dr. William E. Barton's *Life of Abraham Lincoln.*

After this controversy had waxed warm for several weeks in the newspapers of Boston, New York, and Vermont, the *Boston Herald,* which had given liberally of its space for this purpose, closed its columns to further discussion, and, in an editorial entitled "One Question Settled," rendered a decision in favor of Doctor Barton, stating in substance that the popular version of the story of Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel was largely a myth, and that President Lincoln had next to nothing to do with the pardon of the condemned soldier. About two weeks after the publication of the *Boston Herald* editorial, the *New York Times,* in a Sunday edition, published an article by Doctor Barton entitled "An Old Lincoln Myth Dispelled," an article which the author elsewhere declared to be his final word on the subject.[1]

But the "question" didn't *stay* "settled," and the "old Lincoln myth," so called, didn't *stay* "dispelled." Indeed, this question has been very like the nine-headed Hydra of classic fame, which grew two heads wherever one was cut off. Here, however, the similarity ends; for although Hercules, according to the legend, was able at last to subdue that terrible monster, there has yet appeared no Herculean historian who has been able to settle this troublesome question with any semblance of finality. To substantiate this statement one has only to recall two widely divergent stories of Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel which have made their appearance in the short time since Doctor Barton published his final conclusions on the subject and, as he supposed, settled the question for all time — one a radio broadcast[2] and the other a feature article in a well-known Boston newspaper.[3]

The radio broadcast gave the story in dramatic form —

an interesting play indeed, intended to illustrate Lincoln's well-known attribute of mercy, but quite devoid of all historical accuracy. The author chose as the basis of his play the Chittenden version of the pardon story and added many embellishments of his own invention. It will be granted, of course, that the dramatist has every right to draw on the imagination and to expect his readers or hearers to do likewise. In this case it would have been perfectly proper had it not been announced, at the outset of the first broadcast, that the historical accuracy of the play had been vouched for by the Vermont Historical Society. This statement would seem to put the stamp of infallibility on the play and would give the wrong impression to those ignorant of the real facts.

The newspaper article, on the other hand, was of very different tenor. It seems that the writer, in preparation for his task, visited the town of Groton, Vermont, the birthplace of William Scott, talked with a few people there including some of Scott's relatives, learned of the plans there being made for the erection of a memorial tablet on the site of Scott's boyhood home, and then read Doctor Barton's version of the pardon story or talked with him about it. The result was that this writer, with a very superficial knowledge of the question as a whole, stated in substance that the people of this Vermont town were stubborn in refusing to accept the findings of the historical critics. Furthermore, taking his cue from Doctor Barton, he stated that we owe the popular version of the story to Lucius E. Chittenden, whom he straightway condemned as an inaccurate historian. He handled in a summary manner phases of the subject that were and are open to question, and made no mention of points concerning which Doctor Barton had seen fit to change his position after the publication of his *Life of Abraham Lincoln*. From these facts it can be seen that we are confronted with two Lincoln-

Scott stories of very recent authorship: one the product of credulity, the other the product of skepticism at its worst. It cannot justly be claimed, therefore, that the question is "settled."

In presenting this material concerning the pardon of the Sleeping Sentinel I have no desire to start another controversy. At the same time, I believe that the very fact that considerable bitterness as well as prejudice entered into the late controversy on both sides should offer an excuse of some validity, at least, for a new evaluation of evidence, now that the smoke of the battle has cleared away. Moreover, some very interesting and important material bearing on the subject, which was unknown to Doctor Barton and all the other participants in the controversy, has recently been rediscovered. In the sincere desire, therefore, to bring order out of chaos and to determine whether perchance there may be "two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff," I propose to examine the question from every possible point of view. To this end I shall present all available source material, call attention to the leading versions of the pardon story, and review the late controversy in its various phases. In brief, I propose to examine everything and suppress nothing which tends to throw light on the subject.

I do not profess to know the whole truth in regard to this much-debated question. I believe that no one will ever know the whole truth, unless perchance some additional light is thrown upon the question by those sealed private papers of President Lincoln, which, by direction of the will of his son, the late Robert Todd Lincoln, are not to be made public until the year 1947. Believing, however, that the approximate truth can be determined, I shall offer in the final pages of this work a few conclusions which may reasonably be made from a careful examination of all the evidence.

[1]In Dr. Barton's posthumous work, *President Lincoln*, the treatment of the pardon of William Scott is essentially the same as in the *New York Times* article.

[2]First given on February 12, 1929 and repeated on several subsequent anniversaries of Lincoln's birth.

[3]*Boston Globe*, April 14, 1929.

HOW WILLIAM SCOTT BECAME THE SLEEPING SENTINEL

On the margin of a rough, bowlder-strewn pasture, not far from the place where the main highway passes the old neglected burying ground in the southwestern part of the town of Groton, Vermont, stands a granite monument which marks the site of a humble cottage long since gone to ruin. Previous to the erection of this monument the only distinguishing feature of the spot was an old cellar-hole partly filled with rocks, and grass-grown around the edges. But to the motorist whizzing by of a summer day this was only one of ten thousand similar cellar-holes scattered singly or in neighborhood groups here and there throughout the hilly sections of New England — relics of the days of old, before the advent of the railroads had attracted the bulk of the population into the valleys, or the lure of the western gold fields had taken their toll of humanity from the sterile and rocky uplands. Today, however, the passing stranger, arrested by the presence of the monument, may turn aside for a moment to learn that William Scott, known throughout the English-speaking world as the Sleeping Sentinel, lived here as a boy.

It was to this farm that Thomas Scott had come to make himself a home, not many years after his arrival in America from Scotland in 1825. Here he married Mary Wormwood who became the mother of eight children, seven sons and one daughter. The house in which the Scotts first lived and in which most, if not all, of their children were born, was located about three-fourths of a mile east of the highway and

on the farther side of the brook. Before the year 1860, however, the family had moved into the house by the roadside, the location of which is indicated by the monument.

Few families made a greater contribution, numerically at least, to the cause of the Union in the Civil War than that of Thomas Scott. At one time or another during the war five of his sons were enlisted in the service: Daniel, George, John, Joseph, and William. Of these five Scott brothers, John lived for many years after the war; Joseph died soon after his return home, as the result of disabilities contracted in the army; Daniel and George both died in the service, the former on March 25, 1864, in Virginia, and the latter on November 4, 1862, in Maryland; and William, the oldest of the five, not only gave his life while participating in a most heroic charge against a Confederate redoubt, but through a peculiar combination of circumstances which linked his name inseparably with that of Abraham Lincoln, became unquestionably the most noted private soldier in the Civil War.

When President Lincoln issued his call for 75,000 troops directly after the surrender of Fort Sumpter on April 14, 1861, there was an immediate and generous response throughout the northern states. In Vermont, Governor Erastus Fairbanks ordered out the state militia consisting of ten companies. These citizen-soldiers, constituting the First Vermont Regiment, were entirely from the military centers which for the most part were the larger towns of Vermont. Inasmuch as the town of Groton was somewhat remote from any of these centers, making it difficult if not impossible for the young men to meet regularly for drill, there were no soldiers from this town in the First Regiment. When the Second and Third Regiments were raised, however, in response to President Lincoln's second call, then it was that several young men in Groton offered their services and, as it

proved in the case of not a few, their lives for the Union cause.

William Scott enlisted as a private in Company K, Third Vermont Regiment, at Montpelier, on July 10, 1861. Six days later the regiment, consisting of 882 officers and men, was mustered into the service of the United States at St. Johnsbury and was ordered forthwith to report to General Banks at Baltimore. On July 24, the regiment started south by train and, after being feted in several cities en route, arrived at Washington on July 26, and was quartered in a public hall. On the following day the regiment marched to Georgetown Heights and encamped at the head of Chain Bridge on the Potomac River some six miles above Washington. This place, known as Camp Lyon, was of great strategic importance, guarding as it did the Washington reservoir and the bridge which was an important approach to Washington from Virginia.

Here the regiment was joined by its new colonel, Capt. William Farrar Smith, popularly known as "Baldy" Smith, a native of Vermont, and an officer in the regular army. Within a few days after his assuming the command of the Third Vermont, Smith was commissioned brigadier general and given command of all the forces at Chain Bridge, which consisted of the Third Vermont, the Sixth Maine, an artillery company, and a cavalry company. To these were soon added the Second Vermont and the Thirty-third New York.

The troops were made up of raw, green fellows from farm and factory, quite ignorant of military science and, in many cases, of the ordinary responsibility of the soldier. General Smith and his officers, however, went courageously at the task of whipping this motley gang into a well-disciplined brigade. Drill, picket duty, and fatigue duty, together with an occasional all-night vigil in the rifle pits because of rumors that the enemy was about to advance, constituted

the daily routine. In order to enhance the morale of the army and thus better to insure the safety of the capital, a series of stern rules with punishments prescribed for their infringement was promulgated. One of these rules provided that the soldier found asleep on his post while on picket duty should be shot to death.

On the morning of August 31, only a little over a month after the regiment had first encamped at Chain Bridge, the officer of the guard, in making his regular tour of inspection, found William Scott asleep at his post. The young man was straightway arrested and a general court-martial was appointed to meet at the camp of Smith's brigade at 10 o'clock a.m. on Tuesday, September 3.

In the files of the War Department at Washington is a complete report of the trial, from which quotations are here made. After giving the order convening the court and a list of officers detailed to hear the case, the document continues:

> The accused was brought before the Court and the order convening it was read to him. He was then asked if he objected to any member of the detail, to which he replied "No."
>
> The Court was then duly sworn by the Judge Advocate, and the Judge Advocate by the President in the presence of the accused. Private William Scott was then arraigned on the following charge and specification:

CHARGE

VIOLATION OF THE 46TH ARTICLE OF WAR

SPECIFICATION

In this that he, *Private* William Scott, Co. K, 3d Vermont Volunteers, being a regularly posted sentinel, did go to sleep upon his post, this at the hour between three

and four A. M. on the 31st day of August, 1861, while on picket guard, near Camp Lyon, D. C.

To which the prisoner pleaded as follows:

To the Specification, "Not guilty."
To the Charge, "Not guilty."

Captain Thomas F. House, 3d Vermont Volunteers, a witness for the prosecution, being duly sworn, testified as follows:

"On the 30th of August last I was Officer of the Guard which went up the Potomac and on the morning of the 31st I started about three o'clock to make my rounds, and when I came to the post where Scott and his two comrades were stationed, I found them all asleep. The prisoner was a member of my guard and regularly posted."

Question by the prisoner, "What did I say to you after you waked me up?"

Answer, "When I found them all asleep I tried to find out whose duty it was to have been awake at the time. They all said it was Scott's, and Scott also admitted that it was his duty."

Question by member of the Court, "Did you positively wake him and know that it was his guard?"

Answer, "Yes."

The prosecution then closed. The prisoner having no witness to produce and no defense to make, the Court was closed. After mature deliberation on the evidence the Court found the accused as follows:

Of the Specification, "Guilty."
Of the Charge, "Guilty."

And the Court does sentence him, Private William Scott, "To be shot to death," two thirds of the members voted for the sentence.

B. N. HYDE,
Colonel 3d Regiment Vermont Volunteers,
President of the Court.

EDW. McK. HUDSON,
Captain, 14th Infantry,
Judge Advocate.

The proceedings in the foregoing case, having been laid before the *Major General* commanding, in accordance with the 65th ARTICLE OF WAR, the following are the orders thereon:

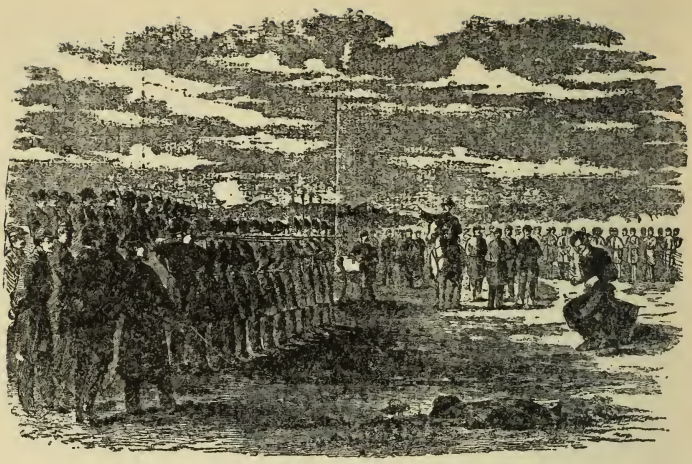
The proceedings, findings, and sentence in the case are approved, the sentence confirmed, and *Private* William Scott, Co. K, 3d Regiment Vermont Volunteers will be shot to death on Monday, the 9th of September, 1861, at such hour and place as the *Brigade Commander* may determine.

By Command of *Major General* McCLELLAN,
S. WILLIAMS,
Assistant Adjutant General.

The death warrant, now on display at the Fairbanks Museum, St. Johnsbury, Vermont, was written on September 4, 1861. It was issued as General Orders No. 6,

By Command of *Major General* McCLELLAN,
S. WILLIAMS, *Assistant Adjutant General.*

To,
Brig. Gen. W. F. SMITH,
Com'dg &c
Chain Bridge.



LINCOLN AND THE SLEEPING SENTINEL

FROM the reports of Scott's comrades who returned from the war, from letters written by the soldiers at the time, and from contemporary newspapers, we learn that the death sentence of William Scott created considerable excitement among the soldiers at Chain Bridge, and aroused a feeling of sympathy in the general public. The *New York Times*[1] stated that others guilty of this misdemeanor had been pardoned by the military authorities or their offence overlooked entirely. Such leniency, however, could not continue longer without serious detriment to the morale of the army and consequently to the safety of the national capital. Scott's case was the first one to be taken seriously. His mis-

demeanor was committed just at the time when the officers had determined that an example should be made of the very next offender. Thus the *New York Times*[2] comments: "The sentence in Scott's case will be fully carried out, that an example may be made which will prevent the recurrence of a similar dereliction among our troops." That Scott was well liked by his comrades is evinced by the following characterization by a comrade:[3] "Scott was a big, awkward country lad who had a heart as big as he was, and was always offering to do something, or help some of his comrades." A letter in a contemporary issue of the *Bennington Banner* also refers to Scott as being "very popular."

In view of all this it seems perfectly natural that Scott's comrades should have attempted to save him from an ignominious death. Although there is probability that several people worked in different ways to secure a pardon, I shall at this point confine myself strictly to a consideration of the evidence that is of record, and in the order in which it appears.

In the files of the War Department may be seen a petition in the handwriting of the Reverend Moses P. Parmelee, chaplain of the Third Vermont Regiment, from which the following is copied:

PETITION

Camp Advance, Va.,
Sept. 7, 1861.

To *Brig. Gen'l* SMITH:

We the undersigned, officers and privates of the Vermont 3d Regiment, would most respectfully and earnestly petition that the life of William Scott, *private* of Company K, now under sentence of death, may be spared.

The petition is signed by Mr. Parmelee and 191 other officers and privates. On the margin is the following notation:

forwarded by
Brig. Gen. W. F. SMITH
Chas. Mundee
Adj.

On Sunday, September 8, General McClellan, whose headquarters were at the corner of H Street and Madison Place, Washington, wrote to Mrs. McClellan as follows: "Mr. Lincoln came this morning to ask me to pardon a man that I had ordered to be shot, suggesting that I could give as a reason in the order that it was by request of the 'Lady President.' "[4]

The *National Republican* (Washington) in its issue for Monday, September 9, contains the following news item:

TO BE SHOT FOR SLEEPING AT HIS POST

Private William Scott of Co. K, Third Vermont Volunteers, found guilty of sleeping on his post, has been sentenced to be shot. Gen. McClellan, having confirmed the sentence, its execution will take place today.

P.S. Respited — At a late hour last night, we were informed by Major Ridenour that he had just presented a petition to the President, numerously signed, praying for the pardon of the unfortunate young soldier above mentioned, and that the President informed him the execution would not take place today.

In order to give the proper setting to the scene which follows, it should be explained that on the night of September 3, General Smith's brigade had moved from its old position at the Washington end of Chain Bridge to a new position

across the river, about a mile from the Virginia end of the bridge. The new encampment was named Camp Advance in recognition of the "advance," small though it was, which the brigade had made on the enemy's ground. On the morning of September 9, while the people of Washington were reading the account of the respite of William Scott in the *National Republican*, a casual observer would have had difficulty in reconciling the statements of the newspaper with the scene which was being enacted at Camp Advance. Here the regiments of the brigade were drawn up in hollow square, ostensibly to witness the execution of William Scott; the firing squad took its position; the prisoner was brought forth; the death sentence was read to him. Then, as the assembled troops were awaiting the fatal volley, some of them doubtless with bated breath, the following pardon was read to the prisoner:

Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac,
Washington, September 8.

Private William Scott, of Company K of the Third Regiment of Vermont Volunteers, having been found guilty by court martial of sleeping on his post while a sentinel on picket guard, has been sentenced to be shot, and the sentence has been approved and ordered to be executed.

The commanding officers of the brigade, the regiment and the company, of the command, together with many other officers and privates of his regiment, have earnestly appealed to the *Major-General* commanding, to spare the life of the offender, and the *President of the United States* has expressed a wish that as this is the first condemnation to death in this army for this crime, mercy may be extended to the criminal. This fact,

viewed in connection with the inexperience of the condemned as a soldier, his previous good conduct and general good character, and the urgent entreaties made on his behalf, have determined the *Major-General* commanding to grant the pardon so earnestly prayed for.

This act of clemency must not be understood as affording a precedent for any future case. The duty of a sentinel is of such a nature, that its neglect by sleeping upon or deserting his post may endanger the safety of a command, or even of the whole army, and all nations affix to the offence the penalty of death.

Private William Scott of Company K of the Third Regiment of Vermont Volunteers, will be released from confinement and returned to duty.

By Command of *Major-General* McCLELLAN,
S. WILLIAMS, *Asst. Adjt.-General.*

The foregoing pardon was widely published throughout the North. It appeared in practically every newspaper in the State of Vermont and the cities of Washington, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Several newspapers reporting it add the following news item: "The pardon was read to the regiment, which heartily expressed their appreciation of this act of Executive clemency."

The reaction of the pardon on soldiers, as well as on civilians, may be judged by a perusal of the excerpts from diaries, letters, and editorials, which are offered in the following pages. The editorials are given in their entirety, inasmuch as they discuss in an interesting manner important phases of the subject.

Mr. Henry Herrick of St. Johnsbury, a member of the Third Regiment Band, writing in his diary under date of September 9, 1861, had this to say: "Scott, who was sen-

tenced to be shot today, was pardoned by the President and ordered to join his company — bully for the President! But he could hardly have done otherwise under the circumstances. Scott had been guard several nights, and the night when he was found asleep had volunteered in the place of a comrade who was sick.[5]

Mr. Francis V. Randall, who was a practicing lawyer of Montpelier when the war broke out, had recruited Company F, Second Vermont Regiment, and had been made its captain. As has already been stated, the Second Regiment was brigaded with the Third at Chain Bridge, and the officers and men of one regiment were on terms of intimacy with those of the other. Consequently, any bit of news was common property. On September 10, the day after Scott's pardon was read to the assembled troops, Captain Randall wrote to the *Green Mountain Freeman* of Montpelier, Vermont, the following letter which was published in the issue of September 14. This letter was copied in at least six other Vermont newspapers and, in part, in the Salem, Massachusetts *Gazette* of October 16.

FROM THE SEAT OF WAR
Correspondence of the Freeman

Camp Lyon, Sept. 10, 1861.

We have had some excitement here for a few days past in consequence of the trial of William Scott of Co. K, 3d Vermont Regiment. (This is the Calais Company.) Young Scott was found sleeping on his post as picket guard. He was sentenced to be shot yesterday. But from the nature of the case all the officers in the camp petitioned the President to pardon him. This petition was taken to Washington Sunday night by the *Chaplain*, Rev. Mr. Parmelee. The mitigating circumstance

was that Scott stood sentry the night before for a sick mess-mate. The President ordered a respite that night, and in the morning fully pardoned him.

A thing occurred growing out of this that will induce me (Democrat that I am) to vote for "Abe" if he is ever candidate again. The encampment where young Scott was confined is about eight miles from Washington, and from Washington to the encampment there is a temporary telegraph. The President telegraphed to the officer in charge of the execution to stay the same, it being for early in the morning. Not hearing from his message the President, fearing that it had not reached its destination or that through some mistake the poor fellow might be executed, came himself after ten o'clock at night to camp to personally see that all was right, but his message had reached its destination.

To make, however, a suitable impression on the men, the fact of this pardon was not communicated, and on the morning all the regiments of the brigade were drawn up in hollow square and the arrangements for the execution all made, and the prisoner brought out to the stand as though he was to be shot, he of course knowing nothing of the pardon. He was deadly pale and shook from head to foot and was almost unable to sustain his weight. After all was ready, the pardon was read to him in the hearing of all. This took a great load off from the minds of that vast crowd, all of whom sympathized most keenly with the unfortunate young man, and they gave vent to their joy in cheer upon cheer for the President that made the land of Dixie ring for miles around. But I tremble for fear that some of our boys may yet get into trouble in this way. It is hard to make them realize the fact that the responsibility of a sentry is

great — awfully great in an enemy's country. This, however, will do them some good. But it is true that we are kept up so much nights that many times it is almost impossible to keep from sleeping. I have seen the boys walking on their beat regularly when they were so completely asleep that they could not observe my approach till I spoke to them. They would mechanically execute their duty, but consciousness had fled.

F. V. RANDALL, *Captain* Co. F, 2d Vermont Reg.

The *New York Times* of September 10 carried the following editorial:

ASLEEP AT HIS POST — TO BE SHOT

A soldier was to be shot yesterday near Washington for sleeping on his post. The offense was committed at the hour between 3 and 4 a.m. on the 31st day of August, while on picket guard, near Camp Lyon, District of Columbia. Found guilty at Court-Martial, *Gen.* McClellan confirmed the finding and the sentence, and *Private* William Scott of the Third Vermont Volunteers would have received a volley of bullets from his comrades as a tragic, terrible vindication, had not the Presidential pardon saved him.

Nothing but the exigencies of martial discipline prevented us from speaking what is now a needless word for the mitigation of the sentence. We knew the imperious necessities of the military rule and would put no stay on its stern retributions. But there were extenuating circumstances that could not be overlooked in this case. And first, the telegram reports that several violations of the forty-sixth article of war, which declared sleeping on post a death-punishable offence, had already

been pardoned by those in command. This was wrong, and it becomes a question whether the officers were not themselves in part morally chargeable with the offense on account of the unwarranted laxity of the precedent thus introduced. The first case of this nature should have met with prompt and peremptory punishment — the offender drummed out of the regiment and sentenced to the penitentiary for a term of years. Had the early offences been thus visited, it is highly probable that they would have found no repetition. But to pardon out and out several cases, and then to leap to the ultimate and awful resort of the death penalty, seems the prompting of a capricious judgment and a confusion of all relations. Moved by no sentimental motives, but looking simply to the fitness of things, we thought Private Scott's punishment should have been softened to such as we have indicated. Let it then be well understood that the next case is death, and we doubt its recurrence.

Besides, the act of sleeping on one's post belongs to a peculiar class of crimes which are to be judged apart — namely, crimes beyond the control of volition. All the presumptions are that this offense was involuntary. The danger which a soldier on picket guard — at a time when most of our fighting is a war of pickets — runs in going to sleep are so great as to make it highly probable that if he succumbs to slumber it is against the sternest efforts of the will. It is a well-known physiologic fact that there are organizations which find it impossible to resist the overpowering effects of drowsiness. Military men have always taken this into account, and everyone will recall the anecdote of the great Napoleon who, when he found on one of his nightly rounds a sentinel

asleep, himself shouldered the musket and stood guard for a couple of hours till the poor fellow had finished his involuntary nap! This is not cited as an example to be forthwith imitated by all our generals; it shows, however, that that lofty, warlike genius recognized that there are classes of facts which cannot be judged of in a generalized way, but which must make their own law. The death penalty for this dereliction has disappeared from the military code of all advanced nations, like flogging and other needless barbarities. We borrow the practice from the English, whose penal code a great jurist, Sir Samuel Romilly, declared to be the most brutal in the world and worthy of the Anthropophaginians. Severity in the army and navy is sublime, but it needs genius to temper and exercise it; and we think that, taking all the antecedents and concomitants into account, the American people are quite unprepared to hear of a measure of such fearful and unwarranted vigor as that which was awarded private Scott.

The *National Republican* of Washington, under date of September 10, stated editorially:

> The pardon by President Lincoln of the young soldier, who was to have been slain today for sleeping upon his post while performing the duty of a sentinel, is received with great favor by the citizens and the soldiers. We are opposed to capital punishment, but if there is an offense for which a man should be put to death, we think young Scott committed it. A sentinel is placed upon his post to *watch* the enemy, and to sound the alarm upon the slightest approach of danger — he guards the sleeping hosts from all harm and his vigilance may save a whole army, and the cause he serves from destruction. Scott

slept upon his post almost in view of the enemy, but as they happened to be unconscious of his want of fidelity, no disaster followed except to himself. This is the first offense of the kind, since the beginning of the rebellion, and the President has very properly saved the life of the offender, but we hope he will save no more. The sentinel who, hereafter, sleeps upon his post will have no excuse — he will deserve death, and we hope he will get his deserts.

And the *Sunday Morning Chronicle* of September 15 printed an editorial entitled,

A LESSON

An interesting case has arisen during the past week. *Private* William Scott, Third Regiment, Vermont Volunteers, was found sleeping on his post and was sentenced to be shot. The sentence was approved by *General* McClellan and ordered to be carried into effect. The President, however, naturally hesitated to take a life, and, considering the inexperience and good behavior of the accused, interfered and granted a pardon.

We allude to this because it is a lesson to the volunteers and a tribute to the great goodness of heart of our excellent President. But the soldiers must not presume on this clemency. To sleep when on guard is a fatal offence; for on the vigilance of a guard is often the safety of an army; and the President may be compelled, in the interests of the service, to perform a painful and disagreeable duty.

The September 16th issue of *Walton's Daily Journal* of Montpelier, Vermont, contains a letter from a correspondent

who signs himself "J.B.L." It is dated at Chain Bridge, on September 11. After describing a visit of President Lincoln to the camp to view the fortifications, on September 10, he concludes: "Several days since, William Scott, 3d Vermont, was sentenced to be shot, but on Monday, pardon was granted by the President."

The Vermont Phoenix of Brattleboro has in its issue of September 19 a story said to be "Copied from the *New York Times* Correspondence."

> There was a good deal of excitement in the city (Washington) on Sunday over the sentence of *Private* Scott of the Third Vermont Regiment, who was to have been hung Monday morning for the dangerous misdemeanor of sleeping on his post. The heinousness of the offense consists in the results which might follow its indulgence. By the sleep of a few sentinels the capital might be lost, which the government would not give up though it cost ten thousand lives. The question then is, shall we hesitate to sacrifice a single life to make our defenses secure while we readily offer up thousands in another way for the same object? *Gen.* McClellan said no, and sentenced the sleepy fellow to be shot. But the President interposed to save his life. It is to be published for the benefit of all the troops that the pardon is granted because it is the first offense of the kind and an intimation will be given that the President will not interpose again. It was feared that the execution would not be understood at the North and that it would have a bad effect upon recruiting there. A very strong feeling in favor of the condemned prevailed here and he was in one or two instances alluded to in the pulpits of the city.

There was probably no place in the country where the gloom over the condemnation of William Scott was more profound, or the rejoicing over his pardon more spontaneous, than in Groton, Vermont, his home town. At the time of the newspaper controversy over the subject of the pardon, in the summer and autumn of 1926, there were several people living in that town who were former schoolmates or acquaintances of Scott. One elderly lady[6] remembered how, as a girl, she spent the day of the supposed execution of Scott with his mother, trying in every way possible to comfort her. All remembered, not only the rejoicing when the news of the pardon came, but also the expressions of gratitude to President Lincoln for his act of mercy.

So great was this gratitude in the Scott family that Thomas Scott, when he took occasion to visit his sons in the army, determined to go to the White House to thank President Lincoln personally. The Groton friends of William Scott, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, were unable to fix the exact date of the elder Scott's visit to Washington or to say whether it was before or after William's death. The facts clear in their minds were that Scott visited his boys, called at the White House and thanked President Lincoln, and received from him as a practical souvenir of his visit a ten-dollar bill.

The late Timothy Emery of Groton, a private in the Third Vermont Regiment, at the time of the controversy of 1926 recalled the elder Scott's visit to the army. The circumstances were unusual. It was just before a great battle, when all civilians who had been visiting the soldiers had been ordered out of the vicinity. After all, save the soldiers, had left the field Thomas Scott appeared on the scene. When his acquaintances among the soldiers expressed surprise that he had this privilege which was denied all others, he, according

to Emery, claimed to have received a pass from President Lincoln.

Another person[7] who was not a resident of Groton — a person living at the time of the newspaper controversy — remembered seeing Thomas Scott on the final lap of his journey home from Washington. Scott was a passenger on the stage running from Wells River (then the nearest railroad station) to Groton. He alighted at South Ryegate, while the mail was being changed, and told the bystanders of his trip to Washington, including his visit to the President.

That this story of Thomas Scott's call at the White House was not the fiction of these contemporaries of William Scott in Groton and vicinity is further proved by the corroborative testimony of the late Reverend Joseph Hamilton, for many years a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Vermont. Mr. Hamilton stated that he delivered an address at Rochester, Vermont, on a certain Memorial Day some years after the war, in which he told the story of Lincoln's pardon of the Sleeping Sentinel. After the exercises, an old man came to him and stated that he was Thomas Scott and that the young soldier to whom Mr. Hamilton had referred was his son. Mr. Hamilton expressed surprise that the elder Scott was in that town, because he had supposed that he was a resident of Groton. Scott explained to him that the family had removed from Groton to Rochester some years after the war. Scott then told the clergyman of his visit to Washington. He stated, according to Mr. Hamilton, that he called on President Lincoln and thanked him for pardoning his son. The President replied in substance that he had always thought it better to save life than to destroy life, especially when the one concerned had been no more to blame for his misdemeanor than William Scott had been. After the elder Scott had told Mr. Lincoln

that all of his boys were in the service the President directed that a pass be issued to him to visit them. He then asked Scott how he was going to get along on the farm with no help from his boys, to which the old man replied that he supposed he could "get along in some way or other." As Scott arose to depart, the President followed him to the door and slipped a ten-dollar bill[8] into his hand.

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[1]September 10, 1861 (editorial).

[2]September 8, 1861.

[3]Statement of Mr. Arthur E. Worthen, St. Johnsbury, Vermont, furnished by his daughter, Mrs. Josie Tyler, Melrose, Massachusetts.

[4]*McClellan's Own Story*, p. 91.

[5]Furnished by his niece, Mrs. Josie Tyler, Melrose, Massachusetts.

[6]Mrs. Elmira Welch, deceased.

[7]Mr. Albert H. Bailey, Wells River, Vermont, deceased.

[8]Mr. Hoyt, Waits River, Vermont, stepbrother of William Scott told me that it was a twenty-dollar bill.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

THROUGHOUT the autumn and winter of 1861 the Army of the Potomac was, for most part, encamped on the Virginia side of the river, just across from Washington. About five miles to the south were the outposts of the Confederates, and ten miles further on at Centerville and Manassas was their main army.

During this period the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Vermont Regiments arrived from the North, and these, together with the Second and Third Regiments, were soon afterwards organized into the Second Brigade of the Second Division of the Sixth Corps, and were known as the Vermont Brigade, of which Gen. W. H. T. Brooks became commander. At the same time General Smith was promoted to the command of the Second Division. Here at Camp Griffin, as the winter encampment was called, the Vermont soldiers were badly ravaged by disease, due mostly to unhealthy location and improper sanitation. One little skirmish at Lewinsville, which cost the lives of several Vermonters, was the only event which gave variety to the dreary monotony of daily drill and picket duty. The general inactivity of the army during these five months was indicated by the almost daily, and now famous, dispatches from Washington, "All quiet on the Potomac." But General McClellan was preparing for his great advance on Richmond, and he was determined to have an army sufficiently large and well trained not only to accomplish this great project, but also to afford absolutely adequate protection to Washington.

On March 8, 1862 came the welcome order to break camp and on the following day the entire army of about 120,000 moved to a position near Fairfax Court House, the Vermont

troops being stationed at Flint Hill. On March 14, with rain overhead, and deep mud under foot, the army moved again, this time to a position within five miles of Alexandria, which was given the name of Camp Misery. Here the troops waited a little over a week for the transports which were to take them down the Potomac River to Hampton where the great Peninsular Campaign was to begin.

Of the daily life of William Scott during this period we know little. The universal testimony of soldiers who returned from the war was that he was a good soldier, faithful, loyal, helpful. One specific characterization has been left to us by the late Arthur E. Worthen of St. Johnsbury, a member of the Third Regiment Band, who said: "Scott couldn't keep step to a march to save his life and whoever marched in front of him was greatly annoyed by Scott hitting his heels."[1]

So far as is known, only four letters written by William Scott have escaped the ravages of time and all these were sent from Virginia to various friends in Groton, Vermont. The earliest in point of time was written about a month after his pardon. As it throws light on Scott's religious tendency, of which some mention will later be made, it is given here in part with slight corrections in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.[2]

Camp Griffin, October 13, 1861.

ABSENT FRIEND:

I received your letter and was glad to hear that you and the rest, what are left, are well.

I think it high time that we were looking out for our souls' welfare. Time is but short at the longest. We are certain death is like a thief which cometh in the night when we think not.

I heard that Edwin Darling was dead and Burnham, too. Charles Emery got a letter which told us the news, but may God be with the widows and fatherless. By the hand of God helping me, I shall some day outride the storms of affliction and land our soul on the other side of Jordan and land our weary souls home to rest where there will be no death. There we shall have it all peace and harmony. It stands us in hand to be ready for death any time, for in such an hour as you think not the son of man cometh to destroy the earth. . . .

From your friend

WILLIAM SCOTT.

Another letter — the last of the four in date — will also be given here in part. It was written at Camp Misery just after the removal of the army from Camp Griffin.

March 18, 1862.

ABSENT BUT NOT FORGOTTEN FRIEND,

I seat myself to write that I am well and hope that when these few scrabbled lines reach you they will find you the same. The Groton boys are all well now. We haven't had much snow here this winter, but I'd rather see all the snow that ever fell in Vermont than to endure the weather we have to endure here. It is very cold and wet. The mud is awfully deep. We moved from Camp Griffin and moved to Flint Hill and stopped there five days, and then moved to within five miles of Alexandria. We expect to go down to the coast soon. We are in the woods now. The night we came from Flint Hill it rained all night. It rained like everything, and we never slept a wink all night. A soldier's life is nothing more or less than a dog's life.

> . . . And now I must bid you a long farewell. . . . There is a little more that I will write and tell about — the girls here in Virginia. There are no girls here. I haven't seen but one or two white girls since I have been here, but there are black ones enough. . . . I should like to be home this spring to get some new sugar to eat, but I think that we shall be home before a great while for we are fetching the dum rebs[3] as fast as we can. We are whipping them in every spot we start on them. . . . So I must bid you good bye. This from
>
> WILLIAM SCOTT[4].

Besides proving conclusively that Camp Misery was rightly named, the letter contains two bits of pathos. Only the man who was once a Vermont farm boy, accustomed to take a hand at the making of maple sugar and to enjoy all the fun that goes with that magic process, can appreciate the full significance of that sentence, "I should like to be home this spring to get some new sugar to eat." Many other exile Vermonters, whose way of life has been much more luxurious than was poor Scott's at Camp Misery, have had the same feeling

When spring brings back blue days and fair.

And his "long farewell" to his Groton friend proved to be a long farewell indeed; it was a last farewell.

On Sunday, March 23, or five days after the foregoing letter was written, the Federal troops marched down to Alexandria, where they went aboard the transports. On the following day the boats steamed down the Potomac River, down the broad Chesapeake Bay, to Hampton. Here the troops disembarked and made ready for their advance towards the Confederate capital. This campaign is known in

history as the Peninsula Campaign, for the reason that the way to Richmond led up the narrow peninsula between the York and the James Rivers. For the next few days there were marches and counter marches. Little was accomplished, inasmuch as the Federal generals were totally ignorant of the nature of the country over which the army was to pass.

At length, upon the arrival of General McClellan on the third of April, the army began its advance towards Yorktown. One portion, accompanied by General McClellan, took the direct route by way of Great Bethel, while the other portion headed by General Smith's division kept to the southerly route by the James River. The Confederates offered no resistance, but steadily fell back before the advance of the Federals until they came to Warwick Creek. Here they took refuge behind their redoubts and rifle pits, which extended the entire width of the Peninsula, or about seven miles. In making these fortifications, the Confederates had taken advantage of natural features. On the northern or Yorktown side they were aided by high bluffs upon which they mounted heavy guns, while further south, the Warwick Creek, a sluggish stream which empties into the James River, extended for some four or five miles. This stream, which had been dammed previously in two places for water power, one at Lee's Mill and another at Wynn's Mill, had been dammed more recently in three other places for defense purposes. The result of this construction was a series of ponds or morasses which were difficult to cross. Moreover, all places on the river which were otherwise easily crossed were defended by artillery.

General McClellan, believing that large forces of the Confederates were intrenched behind the long line of fortifications stretching across the Peninsula, and that the great battle which was to decide the existing contest was to be

fought in this place, delayed attack until the big siege guns could be brought up from the rear. This necessitated the construction of corduroy roads through the swampy land leading to Warwick Creek. After several days of preparation, during which time the Federal pickets, sharpshooters, and skirmishers had kept an eye on the opposite bank of the river, and had actually engaged in minor hostilities, word was passed that an assault was about to be made.

The point of attack selected by the commanding general in consultation with Generals Keyes and Smith, the corps and division commanders respectively, was a redoubt on the Warwick Creek about midway between Lee's Mill and Wynn's Mill, a place where the Confederates had recently been seen actively engaged in strengthening their fortifications. Opposite this redoubt on the ground occupied by the Federal troops was a large clearing known as Garrow Farm, in the midst of which stood three chimneys, the remains of the Garrow house which had been fired by the Confederates upon their retreat a few days before. In the woods on either side and in the rear of this clearing were posted the artillery and the several brigades of Smith's division. General McClellan's orders to General Smith were to stop the enemy's work on the redoubt opposite the Garrow Farm and to send a small body of skirmishers across the creek to ascertain the strength of the enemy and the general lay of the land. He was instructed not to bring on a general engagement at this time. These orders were issued on April 15.

On the following day General Smith posted his sharpshooters near the river and under cover of the woods on either side of the Garrow clearing. He then brought out his artillery and opened fire. The Confederates at first replied vigorously, but were finally forced to cover. Now had come the time for the infantry charge. The honor of making this

charge — the first assault on an intrenched line, made by the Army of the Potomac, was given to the Vermont troops. Led by Captain Pingree[5], four companies of the Third Vermont — Companies D and F in advance, followed by Companies E and K — burst out of the woods and ran to the bank of the Warwick. Unclasping their belts and holding their cartridges in one hand and their muskets in the other, they dashed through the waist-deep water and mud of the sluggish stream amid a shower of bullets from the rifle pits, charged up the bank, and routed the enemy who fled panic-stricken to the redoubts. With cheers the Vermonters started to follow the Confederates, but were wisely ordered back by Captain Pingree who had been instructed to wait for reenforcements in case he was successful in gaining the first rifle pits. Lustily did they cheer and frantically did they wave their handkerchiefs in token of victory and as a signal for reenforcements. Meanwhile the Confederates, having been rallied from their defeat and strengthened by additional forces, made a counter attack. To their dismay the Vermonters discovered that, notwithstanding their precautions in crossing the river, much of their ammunition was ruined by water. Sharing with one another whatever dry cartridges were to be found, they held their ground and waited, hemmed in on three sides by a vastly superior force and showered upon by musketry and artillery at close range. Captain Pingree dispatched three different messengers to the colonel across the river for reenforcements or permission to retreat; but not until more than thirty minutes had elapsed after the capture of the rifle pits did he receive the order to withdraw. Of the one hundred ninety-two men who made that heroic charge into the jaws of death barely one hundred returned unharmed. Among the mortally wounded was William Scott.

Benedict, in his history *Vermont in the Civil War*, says: "They made as gallant a dash as was ever attempted; had carried a line of rifle pits; had dispersed, with serious loss, a Confederate regiment five hundred strong; and had held their position in front of a Confederate brigade for forty minutes and until they were ordered back. More could not have been asked of or done by mortal men."

General Smith in his report says: "Among the four companies of skirmishers of the Third Vermont who crossed the creek, there were more individual acts of heroism performed than I ever read of in a great battle."

There was scarcely a northern newspaper which did not give superlative praise to the Vermont troops. Here are a few statements culled at random:

> Braver men never entered the field.[6]
>
> They covered themselves with glory.[7]
>
> The conduct of the Vermont troops is spoken of in the highest terms, earning for the Green Mountain Boys laurels only to be worn by the brave.[8]
>
> Never was a fire received with greater steadiness or more glorious intrepidity. Except those hit, not a man of the magnificent Vermonters wavered, but all finely pushed on, and with a shout arose upon the bank, and pushed upon the enemy with the bayonet, and fairly drove them out in utter rout and confusion.[9]

The war correspondent of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, who was an eye witness of all activities at the front, wrote a most glowing account for his newspaper.[10] After giving details of the various stages of the day's fighting, he wound up his story with the following paragraphs:

A THRILLING ROMANCE: TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION

A DYING SOLDIER PRAYS FOR PRESIDENT

Never, until we stood by the grave of the Green Mountain Boy, did we realize how much stranger is truth than fiction. A private was court-martialed for sleeping on his post out near Chain Bridge on the upper Potomac. He was convicted; his sentence was death; the finding was approved by the General and the day fixed for his execution. He was a youth of more than ordinary intelligence; he did not beg for pardon, but was willing to meet his fate.

The time drew near; the stern necessity of war required that an example should be made of some one; his was an aggravated case. But the case reached the ears of the President; he resolved to save him; he signed a pardon and sent it out; the day came. "Suppose," thought the President, "my pardon has not reached him." The telegraph was called into requisition; an answer did not come promptly. "Bring up my carriage," he ordered. It came; and soon the important state matters were dropped and through the hot broiling sun and dusty roads he rode to the camp, about ten miles, and saw that the soldier was saved!

He had, doubtless, forgotten the incident, but the soldier did not. When the Third Vermont charged upon the rifle-pits, the enemy poured a volley upon them. The first man who fell, with six bullets in his body, was William Scott of Company K. His comrades caught him up, and as his life-blood ebbed away, he raised to heaven, amid the din of war, the cries of the dying, and the shouts of the enemy, a prayer for the President, and

as he died he remarked to his comrade that he had shown he was no coward, and not afraid to die.

He was interred, in the presence of his regiment, in a little grove, about two miles to the rear of the rebel fort, in the center of a group of holly and vines; a few cherry trees, in full bloom, are scattered around the edge. In digging his grave a skull and bones were found and metal buttons, showing that the identical spot had been used in the Revolutionary War for our fathers who fell in the same cause. The chaplain narrated the circumstance to the boys, who stood around with uncovered heads. He prayed for the President and paid the most glowing tribute to his noble heart that we ever heard. The tears started to their eyes as the clods of earth were thrown upon him in his narrow grave, where he lay shrouded in his coat and blanket.

The men separated; in a few minutes all were engaged in something around the camp as though nothing had happened unusual; but the scene will live upon their memories while life lasts. The calm look of Scott's face, the seeming look of satisfaction he felt, still lingered; and could the President have seen him, he would have felt that his act of mercy had been wisely bestowed.

This story of the death of William Scott was widely copied by northern newspapers as was the pardon which was printed on the previous September. Practically all great metropolitan dailies as well as the country weeklies of New England carried it in their columns. It was reprinted in Frank Moore's *Anecdotes, Poetry, and Incidents of the War*, published in 1866, and thus gained a permanent place in the literature of the Civil War.

Portions of two contemporary letters are here introduced,

inasmuch as they bear on the subject in question. One is by Charles Emery of the Third Vermont, and the other is by George Philbrick of the Fourth Vermont. Both of these young men were from Groton, Vermont, and friends of William Scott. Emery wrote as follows:[4]

Camp near Yorktown, April 19th, 1862.

. . . I saw the letter you wrote to William Scott, but William never read the letter, for he was killed on the battle field on the 16th. I helped him off the battle field myself. He had five bullets in his body, and lived about twelve hours after he was shot. We had hot fighting on the 16th but I have no time to write about it now. . . .

And this is what Philbrick had to say:

Camp near Yorktown, April 19, 1862.

. . . About 4 o'clock P.M. part of the Third Regiment made a charge on the rebels and lost 32 killed and 50 wounded. William Scott was killed on making the charge. He had five bullets in his body. I did not see him after he was killed, but I saw where he was buried in a peach grove. The trees were all blossomed out, and it was a beautiful place.[4]

In the year 1907 the late Dr. Seth N. Eastman of Groton, Vermont, filled a notebook with reminiscences of the Civil War for the benefit of his descendants. He was a member of the Sixth Regiment. In writing of the operations of the army before Yorktown, he states:

In the affair that I have just mentioned [Battle of Lee's Mill], there were two men killed that I knew,

namely James Battin and William Scott. I helped to lay them to rest. I remember how peaceful they looked as we wrapped them in their overcoats and blankets, and placed them in their shallow graves.[11]

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[1]Furnished by Mrs. Josie Tyler, Melrose, Massachusetts.

[2]In the possession of Mrs. James Main, Groton, Vermont.

[3]A Yankee mollified substitute for "damned rebels."

[4]In the possession of Mrs. Hiram Daniels, Groton, Vermont.

[5]Governor of Vermont, 1884-86.

[6]*New York Tribune*, April 22, 1862.

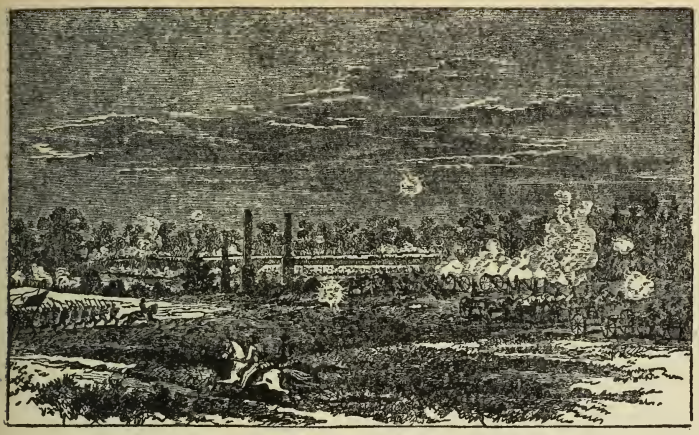
[7]*New York Tribune*, April 22, 1862.

[8]*Boston Journal*, April 19, 1862.

[9]*Boston Journal*, April 21, 1862.

[10]April 21, 1862.

[11]Furnished by Mrs. Alice Eastman, Groton, Vermont.



THE MEN WHO MADE THE STORY FAMOUS

IT SHOULD require no effort of the imagination to perceive that a series of events such as is recorded in the preceding pages would very readily lend itself to an exaggerated treatment. What might have been expected to happen, really happened. This story, so full of dramatic possibilities, became a fruitful source of romance. On came the story tellers, the romantic historians, the poets, the dramatists, each adding his little contribution. Some of these writers kept quite close to the facts; others went far afield. In the next succeeding pages we shall be introduced to some of the men who made the story famous and, through a

perusal of brief quotations from their works, we shall learn what each writer contributed to the story.

(1)

JANVIER AND MURDOCH

Francis De Hayes Janvier, a minor American poet who lived and wrote during the middle of the last century, was the first to make use of the story of Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel in a way to attract any considerable public attention. Janvier was the author of numerous poems which were quite in vogue in his day, one of which, *The Stars and Stripes*, was set to music and made a part of the program at Lincoln's first inaugural ceremony.[1] Although Janvier may be quite unknown to the reading public of today, an examination of the catalogues of some of our larger libraries will disclose the fact that his books are still on the shelves.

The poem entitled *The Sleeping Sentinel* was written very soon after the death of William Scott, quite certainly in the same year. It may be found in the collected poems of Janvier. Like the story of the death of Scott in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, it was included in Frank Moore's *Anecdotes, Poetry, and Incidents of the War*. The poem was widely reprinted in newspapers at the time of its first appearance. It would not be too rash to wager that there are hundreds of copies of this poem yellowing in old scrap-books now tucked away in dusty attics all over the northern section of the country. It was a favorite of professional elocutionists, as well as amateur readers, for years. Its "first edition" was brought out in pamphlet form by T. B. Peterson & Brothers, Philadelphia, and bears the date 1863. The publisher's preface is of such pertinence in a complete consideration of our subject that it is here given in its entirety.

The incidents here woven into verse relate to William Scott, a young soldier from the State of Vermont who, while on duty as a sentinel at night, fell asleep and, having been condemned to die, was pardoned by the President. They form a brief record of his humble life at home and in the field, and of his glorious death in defence of the Union.

This poem was first read on Monday, Jan. 19th, 1863, by James E. Murdoch, the celebrated elocutionist, to a select circle at the Executive Mansion, in the presence of President and Mrs. Lincoln. On the evening of the same day he read it in the Senate Chamber of the United States, which was especially appropriated for the purpose — the President and Mrs. Lincoln being again present, together with one of the largest and most distinguished audiences ever assembled in Washington. It was presented on this occasion anonymously, and produced a profound sensation. On the evening of Feb. 5th, 1863, Mr. Murdoch read it, with a similar result, at the American Academy of Music in Philadelphia to more than three thousand persons, and then announced the author. He also read it, with the same success, in Baltimore, Albany, Boston, and other cities.

It is now published in compliance with a general desire for its circulation.

Mr. James E. Murdoch, the elocutionist mentioned in the foregoing preface, was one of the outstanding figures of his day. As an actor and stage manager he won fame both in this country and in England. After retirement from the stage, he turned his attention to lecturing, teaching elocution, and to public reading. During the war he read in camps to the delight of the soldiers. By his readings he helped to

raise great sums of money for the benefit of the United States Sanitary Commission. His wartime repertoire included not only Janvier's *Sleeping Sentinel*, but also such works as Whittier's *Barbara Frietchie*, Drake's *Freedom*, and Read's *Sheridan's Ride*. Murdoch is always spoken of as a man of striking personality and great magnetic power. On one occasion, in the early days of the war, he was called upon to recite Drake's *The American Flag*. It is said that the effect was prodigious, and that the audience was in an uproar of enthusiasm. Simon Cameron, Secretary of War, stated, "I never before in my life felt the full meaning of a flag to fight for."[2]

The newspapers of Washington and several other cities gave reports of Murdoch's rendering of *The Sleeping Sentinel* in the Senate Chamber on the occasion already referred to. Several Vermont newspapers reprinted these reports because of the interest in that state for the subject of the poem. The account in the *National Republican* of January 20, 1863 is as follows:

MURDOCH'S READINGS

> The entertainment offered by this gentlemen, in the Senate Chamber last evening, was a grand success in every particular.
>
> Vice-President Hamlin introduced Mr. Murdoch with some felicitous remarks.
>
> The President and Mrs. Lincoln were there, as was also a large number of distinguished persons. There were many of the elite, and a very large representation of the beauty and fashion of Washington who thronged the Senate Chamber on this occasion. Rarely has a man had the opportunity to speak in such a presence from the rostrum of that hall.

Mr. Murdoch was in his happiest mood, and his recitations, interspersed with remarks, enchained his auditors in almost breathless stillness, except the frequent applause which it was impossible to restrain.

The main feature of the evening's entertainment was the poem, written by some Washington gentleman, who need write nothing more to establish his fame, beyond cavil, as one of the first poets of the day, *The Sleeping Sentinel.*

All our readers will recollect the story of the Vermont soldier who was condemned to die for sleeping at his post. He was pardoned by President Lincoln, and afterwards died on the battlefield, calling on his comrades around him to see how a brave soldier could die for his country. The interesting circumstances of this young man's history were told in beautiful and touching poetry, and recited by Mr. Murdoch in a style wholly his own.

To describe this recitation is impossible. The clear, rich, musical tones of Mr. Murdoch's voice filled every place and thrilled every heart. We shall never enter that Senate Chamber again without thinking of this great poem, the theme upon which it discourses, and without thinking, also, that we hear the same clear, calm voice of the great elocutionist sounding in our ears.

The *Evening Star*, also of Washington, in its issue of January 20th gave the following account of the reading:

Mr. Murdoch's reading in the Senate Chamber last night was attended by the President and Mrs. Lincoln, and a number of senators and representatives and other

distinguished characters. Mr. Murdoch was introduced by Vice-President Hamlin, in a few appropriate remarks. Among the pieces read by Mr. Murdoch was one entitled *The Sleeping Sentinel,* which was particularly interesting from the fact that the President, who had pardoned the "sleeping sentinel"— upon which act the production was founded — was present. These readings of Mr. Murdoch have been among the most instructive and interesting entertainments here for a long time enjoyed.

As stated in the preface, Janvier drew a striking work picture of Scott's home life in Vermont, his enlistment, trial by court-martial, condemnation, and the preparations for his execution. He continues:

Then suddenly was heard the noise of steeds and wheels approach —
And rolling through a cloud of dust, appeared a stately coach.
On, past the guards, and through the field, its rapid course was bent,
Till, halting, mid the lines was seen the nation's President!

He came to save that stricken soul, now waking from despair;
And from a thousand voices rose a shout which rent the air!
The pardoned soldier understood the tones of jubilee,
And, bounding from his fetters, blessed the hand that made him free!

With unabated glamor Janvier continues with the story of Scott's later service in the Peninsula Campaign. Concerning the heroic charge of his regiment at Lee's Mill he writes:

Then, louder than the roaring storm, pealed forth
the stern command,
"Charge! soldiers, charge!" and, at the word, with
shouts, a fearless band,
Two hundred heroes from Vermont, rushed on-
ward through the flood,
And upward, o'er the rising ground, they marked
their way in blood!

The smitten foe before them fled, in terror, from
his post —
While, unsustained, two hundred stood, to battle
with a host!
Then, turning as the rallying ranks, with mur-
derous fire replied,
They bore the fallen o'er the field, and through the
purple tide!

The fallen! And the first who fell in that unequal
strife
Was he whom Mercy sped to save when Justice
claimed his life —
The pardoned soldier! And, while yet the conflict
raged around —
While yet his life-blood ebbed away through
every gaping wound —

While yet his voice grew tremulous, and death
bedimmed his eye —

He called his comrades to attest he had not feared
to die!
And, in his last expiring breath, a prayer to
heaven was sent,
That God, with his unfailing grace, would bless
our president!

(2)

DR. GEORGE T. STEVENS

The next account of William Scott which is worthy of notice is found in the book published in 1866 entitled *Three Years in the Sixth Corps* by Dr. George T. Stevens, surgeon of the 77th New York Regiment. Doctor Stevens was doubtless an excellent surgeon. At any rate he was an excellent writer, and his book, although devoted to the ghastly subject of war, is full of charming bits of description. In the first winter of the war, the 77th New York was assigned to Gen. W. F. Smith's division to which, as we have seen, the Vermont Brigade also belonged. Through most of the war this New York Regiment, as well as the regiments of the Vermont Brigade, formed a part of the Sixth Corps.

Doctor Stevens' account of the Battle of Lee's Mill, in which William Scott was mortally wounded, is doubtless very accurate. It tallies closely with the account in Benedict's *Vermont in the Civil War*. Inasmuch as Doctor Stevens was in close association with the Vermont troops, his story of William Scott would represent the facts as they were generally understood among the soldiers at that time. He writes:

> *Private* William Scott, of Company K, Third Vermont, was in the autumn of 1861 found asleep at his

post on the picket line. It was a grave fault; but the weary soldier, inexperienced in the service and unaccustomed to such night vigils, in an evil hour yielded to the demands of tired nature, little thinking that the lives of hundreds of his comrades were periled by his unfaithfulness. He was tried by a court-martial and sentenced to be shot. The sentence was approved, and at the appointed time he was brought forth to execution. General Smith, desiring to impress upon the minds of his men the terrible consequences of such an offense, formed his troops in line. The culprit was brought out before them and led to the place of execution. The guard, with loaded muskets, stood ready to execute the dreadful sentence which was read before all the troops. All waited in breathless expectation for the order to fire; but, instead, another paper was read. It was a pardon from the President! Then the wildest shouts of joy rang along the line. Shout after shout arose from the division, and hundreds blessed the name of President Lincoln.

There were many circumstances to render this a case of peculiar interest. It was the first sentence of the kind; it was at the beginning of the war, when a soldier's life was regarded of value, and when all eyes were riveted upon the army and every incident was of interest. It was also the first instance of the kind in which the excutive clemency had been exercised. So near had the hour for execution arrived when the President signed the pardon that, fearing that it might not be received in season, he took his carriage and drove to camp, to assure himself that the man's life should be spared.

"I will show President Lincoln that I am not afraid to die for my country," said the grateful soldier; and

well did he fulfill his promise. Among the bravest of those two hundred heroes who crossed the swamp at Lee's Mill was William Scott of Company K, Third Vermont. But he was brought back a corpse. He had shown the President that he was not afraid to die for his country. He was one of the foremost in the charge and one of the first to fall. His comrades made his grave under the shadow of the tall pines; as they folded his blanket around him and lowered him to his resting place, tears stood upon those brown cheeks, but the tears of sorrow were mingled with tears of joy when they thought of his glorious death and his narrow escape from an ignominious fate, and again in their hearts they blessed the man who was always the soldier's friend.

(3)

SERGEANT ISAAC W. AMBLER

During the next few years after the publication of Doctor Stevens' book, several other war histories containing accounts of William Scott made their appearance. Among these was Waite's *Vermont in the Rebellion*. However, as his account of the Sleeping Sentinel incident is not materially different from that of Doctor Stevens, I shall pass on to the year 1873 — a year which saw the publication of a Sleeping Sentinel story that is different. This is found in the autobiography of Sergeant Isaac W. Ambler.

Sergeant Ambler was a picturesque character. He was born in England of poor parents. After the death of his mother and the disappearance of his father, he spent part of his boyhood with his grandmother and part in the almshouse. As a child he worked in the coal mines. As a young man he enlisted in the English army, deserted, escaped to

America, married, lived in dissipation in various towns in Maine and Massachusetts, was reformed, became a lay preacher, a temperance lecturer, and finally city missionary of Biddeford, Maine.

Feeling the need of an education, he wrote a history of his early life, hoping with the proceeds from the sale of this book to educate himself. While he was selling his book in Boston, the Civil War broke out. He at once turned his undivided attention to the impending conflict, urging enlistment and employing his knowledge of military tactics, gained in the English army, in drilling the recently enlisted men. Hearing of his success in Massachusetts as a drill-master, his old friends in Maine urged him to return to his former home.

Upon his arrival in Maine, he assisted in recruiting and drilling the Sixth Maine Regiment and, as a sort of self-appointed drill-master, he accompanied that regiment to the seat of war.

The Sixth Maine, as we have seen, formed a part of General Smith's brigade at Chain Bridge in the early days of the war. At this place Ambler was not only a self-appointed drill-master and general handy man in things military, but he was also a self-appointed assistant chaplain to the brigade. He conducted religious meetings and made himself generally useful as a physician of the soul. In writing of his relations with Scott, he states:

> One more touching incident, of which I was an eye-witness and with which I had something to do, I will describe before I leave the front. It was about this time that William Scott, a private of a Vermont regiment, while on sentry went to sleep; and in this condition was found and taken before a court-martial, tried, found guilty, and was sentenced to be shot. I visited the poor

fellow in the guard tent and said: "William, I hope God has prepared you for the awful trial." He was deeply moved. Tears ran down his sunburnt cheeks. He looked at me a moment and then looked up to heaven and said, "If it is God's will that I must be shot, O God, Thy will be done! Drill-master, pray for me and pray for me in your meeting tonight under the old elm tree." I talked to him as well as I knew how and got down on my knees by his side and prayed God to strengthen him; but my heart was too full for utterance and my feelings for my poor comrade found vent in tears much better than words. We had his case mentioned under the tree in our prayer-meeting, and there were many groans, and tears, and prayers for Scott that night. We knew he was a good soldier and never would have slept on his post if he had not been exhausted from heavy marching and overwork.

When the day came for him to be shot, orders were given for twelve muskets to be placed in position, six of them to be loaded with balls, the others with blanks, and all capped; and twelve men were detailed for the painful duty, each to select his gun so that neither could know who had shed his comrade's blood. The men filed out, six on each side in a line, and William Scott in the center. I took my place beside him and orders were given—"Attention, forward march." As I walked by his side I told him to keep up good heart and die like a soldier and a Christian. He held the Testament in both hands, looking down on it, and kept turning one thumb over the other. I wanted to see if Americans could stand up and be shot as boldly as some Europeans had done. I had seen English soldiers kneel on their coffins and open their bosoms with their own hands until six bul-

lets pierced them, and fall headlong in their coffins. I was anxious that William should stand as firm.

When we reached the spot where my comrade was to die, all the regiments, some ten thousand men, had fallen in and formed round in the form of a triangle, its open point looking off into Virginia, opposite which William stood. I stood beside him when his crime was read and the sentence of the court-martial to be shot, encouraging him to put his trust in God and meet death like a man. I then stepped aside, as the twelve men were getting into position to fire. He looked toward the open space, off into Virginia, and then looked at me and dropped his head.

At this time word rang along the lines that a horseman was seen approaching, waving his sword in the air. He dashed up to the lines, his horse covered with foam, and waving his sword again handed a dispatch to an orderly who passed it to the officer in charge. He opened it with a trembling hand and, with a more tremulous voice, read the pardon sent by President Lincoln while cheer after cheer rent the air as the president followed rapidly in his coach. When the word fell on Scott's ear he ran to me and fell on my neck with both arms around me, exclaiming, "I am saved." I cried like a baby and could not help it; and the eyes of the soldiers filled with tears as they cheered the good president for this just act of clemency, and full well did William Scott merit it. Most, if not all of my readers, have read of William's heroic conduct afterwards until he met his death on the field of battle, gallantly fighting for the Union.

It is evident that Sergeant Ambler, having forgotten some of the details of this story as he sat down to write, refreshed his memory from Janvier's poetic version.

In a later edition of Sergeant Ambler's book, printed in 1883, is an appendix containing numerous testimonials and letters to the author. One of these is from the pen of Captain Isaac Frazier of the Sixth Maine Regiment, who was a member of the court-martial before which William Scott was tried and condemned. His reference to the trial is as follows:

> Being the senior captain of the regiment, I became a member of that court-martial and was the only member who was not in favor of the enforcement of the army law, "To be shot dead"; and I think I am now the only survivor of that body. Knowing that fatigue, added to several days of physical suffering, had rendered the otherwise able soldier unfit for the tedious night-watch, I believed that some other punishment was advisable. The pitying love which our martyred Lincoln extended to the soldier is well portrayed in the book, and the young man's gratitude to him and his devotion to his country was attested at Warwick Creek with the rendering of his young life.

(4)

GEORGE G. BENEDICT

Vermont in the Civil War, a monumental history in two volumes by Col. George Greenville Benedict, is the authoritative work on the subject of which it treats. Its publication was authorized by the legislature of Vermont in 1878, but it was not until 1886 that the first volume came from the press, so difficult was it for the author to secure the ready co-operation of those who had it in their power to help him.

Colonel Benedict, a graduate of the University of Vermont, and an excellent scholar, was for many years editor of

the *Burlington Free Press*. He served as lieutenant in the Twelfth Vermont Regiment and later as a member of the staff of General George J. Stannard, commander of the Second Vermont Brigade which made such an enviable record at Gettysburg. No other man in Vermont was better qualified for the task of writing this military history. Although Colonel Benedict's version of the story of William Scott does not add much to our knowledge of the question, I shall present it here because of the general importance of the work from which it is taken.

> While here (Chain Bridge), an incident occurred which created no small sensation in the army, was widely published in the newspapers, and became a fruitful theme for poetry and romance. William Scott, a private in Company K, of the Third Vermont, was found asleep on his post, while on picket duty; was tried by court-martial for the crime, found guilty, and sentenced to be shot — the first sentence of its kind on record in the army. Scott was only twenty-two years of age, of good character, and had been on picket duty two nights in succession, having voluntarily taken the place of a sick comrade the night before. His case aroused great sympathy. A petition for his pardon was signed by hundreds, from privates of the various regiments of the brigade up to General Smith, and was taken to Washington by Chaplain Parmelee. The sentence was promulgated on the 5th of September and was to be executed on the morning of the 8th. On the evening of the 7th, the matter came to the knowledge of President Lincoln and he at once granted a reprieve of the sentence. His order for the stay of the execution was telegraphed to Camp Advance, but hearing nothing from it

and feeling that it might have miscarried, Mr. Lincoln ordered his carriage, and a little before midnight, after a drive of nearly ten miles, made his appearance at brigade headquarters to reiterate his order in person and to make sure of the life of the young Vermonter. Next morning the arrangements for the execution went on. The brigade was drawn up in hollow square, a shooting party detailed, and Scott was brought out as if for death. He was deadly pale and an occasional shudder shook his exhausted frame, but he asked for no mercy. The following order was then read:

Here Colonel Benedict inserts the pardon in full. He continues,

The camp rang with cheers for President Lincoln after the dismissal of the parade, and Scott returned to his company to do good service as a soldier and to give his life seven months later while gallantly charging the rebel rifle pits at Lee's Mill.

* * * * *

Among the men of the Third who charged the rifle pits was William Scott, the young man who was sentenced to death for sleeping on his post soon after the regiment went out and was pardoned by the President. Scott pressed forward where the balls were flying thickest and fell with several mortal wounds. His comrades raised him up and heard him with his dying breath, amid the shouting and din of the fight, lift a prayer for God's blessing on President Lincoln, who had given him a chance to show that he was no coward or sneak and not afraid to die. There were not many more touching incidents than this in the war.

In a footnote Colonel Benedict adds:

> Scott was buried in a little grove of holly and wild cherry trees, on the Garrow farm, in a spot where some Revolutionary soldiers who fell in the siege of Yorktown, nearly eighty years before, had found burial, as shown by buttons and a belt clasp thrown up in digging Scott's grave. The chaplain prayed earnestly for the President, and on the calm face of the dead his comrades thought they saw a look of satisfaction and peace, which would have richly rewarded the kind heart of Abraham Lincoln, if he could have seen it, for his act of mercy.
>
> The incident was made known to Mr. Lincoln in an interview with Adjutant General Peter T. Washburn. Subsequently Mr. Lincoln alluded to it with emotion, speaking also in terms of highest praise of the bravery of the Vermonters at Lee's Mill.

(5)

LUCIUS E. CHITTENDEN

The most famous version of the story of William Scott is that found in Lucius E. Chittenden's *Recollections of President Lincoln and his Administration*, published in 1891. The story as told by Chittenden, comprising an entire chapter entitled *President Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel*, forms the basis of most of the stories on the subject found in subsequent biographies of Lincoln. So great was the interest in Chittenden's treatment of the incident that the publishers brought out this chapter in a separate little volume in 1909.

Chittenden was a member of a famous Vermont family that had given to the state its first governor. He was a prac-

ticing lawyer in Burlington at the outbreak of the Civil War. President Lincoln called him to Washington as Register of the Treasury, an office which he held throughout the Lincoln administration. He was one of the men whom Lincoln trusted and to whose home the President often stole away for a quiet chat as a relief from the pressure of matters of state.

Inasmuch as Chittenden's treatment of the Scott incident is too lengthy to be here quoted verbatim, let us consider a brief resumé with an occasional quotation.

One September morning, shortly before the day set for Scott's execution, a party of soldiers from the Third Vermont called upon Chittenden, requesting aid of him on behalf of their condemned comrade. They had come to him, not only as a fellow Vermonter who would have a sympathetic ear for their story, but also as a lawyer who could help them in a professional way. They maintained that the trial had not been fair, and they had collected a sum of money to be used to employ counsel and to secure a new trial. Realizing that their plan would necessitate too much delay, and acting upon impulse, Chittenden led the boys directly to the White House where he introduced them to the President and requested their leader to tell his story. After listening to the young man's earnest appeal, Lincoln expressed the opinion that, under the circumstances, young Scott should not be put to death, at any rate not until he, the President, could look further into the matter. He then promised Chittenden and the soldiers that he would attend to the matter personally.

Their mission ended, Chittenden and the soldiers left the White House to go their several ways. Within a day or two the papers reported that a soldier who had been sentenced to be shot had been pardoned by the President and returned to his company; but aside from this bit of news Chittenden

heard no more concerning Scott until the following December. Then it was that a comrade of Scott, who was of the committee that waited on Chittenden on September to solicit his assistance at the time of Scott's condemnation, called upon him. Chittenden kept the soldier over night and learned from him that the President went up to Chain Bridge, had a long talk with Scott, and assured him that he would be pardoned; that a regular order for the pardon had been read in the presence of the regiment, signed by General McClellan, but that every one knew that his life had been spared by the President. The soldier, according to Chittenden, went on to describe Scott's splendid work in the army — his devotion to duty, his feats of strength, his offer of promotion which, for some reason, he refused. He said that it was a long time before Scott would speak of his interview with the President. One night, when he had received a long letter from home, he opened his heart and told the story to his comrades.

Scott said that the President spoke kindly to him, asking him about the people at home, the neighbors, the farm, and where he went to school. Then, as the conversation drifted towards the terrible event scheduled for the morrow and Scott was about to request that the firing squad be made up of strangers instead of friends from his own company, the President arose and, laying his hand on Scott's shoulder, bade him look him squarely in the face. Said Lincoln: "My boy, you are not going to be shot tomorrow. I believe you when you tell me that you could not keep awake. I am going to trust you and send you back to your regiment. But I have been put to a great deal of trouble on your account. I have had to come up here from Washington when I have a great deal to do; and what I want to know is, how are you going to pay my bill"?[3]

Scott was astounded. So sure was he of the execution of the sentence of death that this sudden sense of freedom left him almost speechless. Stammeringly he told the President that the farm could be mortgaged and that the boys of the regiment would help out when the pay day came around. To which Lincoln replied: "My bill is a very large one. Your friends cannot pay it, nor your bounty, nor the farm, nor all your comrades! There is only one man in all the world who can pay it and his name is William Scott! If from this day William Scott does his duty so that, if I was there when he comes to die, he can look me in the face as he does now and say, 'I have kept my promise and have done my duty as a soldier,' then my debt will be paid. Will you make that promise and try to keep it?"

Scott replied that he would try hard to do his duty. He wanted to say many things to the President to show his gratitude, but his thoughts somehow would not take the form of speech. And Lincoln went his way.

After giving a good description of the heroic charge of the Vermonters at Lee's Mill, Chittenden proceeds to picture the closing scenes of Scott's life as described to him by a wounded comrade of Scott on a hospital cot in Washington:

> While his strength was failing, his life ebbing away, and we looked to see his voice sink into a whisper, his face lighted up and his voice came out natural and clear as he said: "If any of you ever have the chance, I wish you would tell President Lincoln that I have never forgotten the kind words he said to me at Chain Bridge; that I have tried to be a good soldier and true to the flag; that I should have paid my whole debt to him if I had lived; and now, when I know that I am dying, I think of his kind face and thank him again, because he

gave me a chance to fall like a soldier in battle, and not die like a coward by the hands of my comrades."

* * *

Scott would have been satisfied to rest in the same grave with his comrades, but we wanted to know where he lay. There was a small grove of cherry trees just in the rear of the camp, with a noble oak in its centre. At the foot of this oak we dug his grave. There we laid him with his empty rifle and accoutrements by his side. Deep into the oak we cut the initials, "W. S.," and under it the words, "A Brave Soldier." Our chaplain said a short prayer. We fired a volley over his grave. Will you carry his last message to the President?

Soon after this interview with the wounded soldier, Chittenden, true to his promise, carried Scott's dying message to President Lincoln. As he reproached himself for so unceremoniously thrusting Scott's case before the President and thus causing him so much trouble for a private soldier, Lincoln replied:

I advise you always to yield to such impulses. You did me as great a favor as the boy. It was a new experience for me — a study that was interesting, though I have had more to do with people of his class than any other. Did you know that Scott and I had a long visit? I was much interested in the boy. I am truly sorry that he is dead, for he was a good boy — too good a boy to be shot for obeying nature. I am glad I interfered.

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[1]Clark, *Abraham Lincoln, the Merciful President.*

[2]Murdoch, *The Stage*, p. 23.

[3]This quotation, and the four succeeding quotations are from *Recollections of President Lincoln and His Administration* by L. E. Chittenden, used by permission of the publishers, Harper and Brothers.

BENEDICT AGAIN

N TURNING again to Col. George G. Benedict, it should be explained that this distinguished historian of Vermont in the Civil War had considerable difficulty in securing the co-operation of officers and soldiers who might have helped him in the preparation of his work. After the publication of the first volume of his history, however, many veterans, who had neglected to speak before, now wrote that data furnished him by others was incorrect or gave the wrong impression. When, therefore, Benedict had occasion to address the Loyal Legion of Vermont on March 14, 1893, taking for his subject *The Element of Romance in Military History*, he called attention to several notable instances in historical writings, including his own, in which errors had unwittingly been incorporated. Says Benedict:

> I will note briefly a few of the conflicts of testimony or victories of romance over fact, in which we as Vermonters may have an especial interest. One of these was the famous romance of the "Sleeping Sentinel." William Scott, a farmer's boy of twenty-one, of Groton, Vermont, private in Co. K of the 3d regiment Vt. Vols., after two nights of duty on the picket line, on one of which he took the place of a sick comrade, during the third night of such duty was found asleep on his post. This was in Sept., 1861, near Chain Bridge, Va., where Gen. William F. Smith's brigade was stationed. No engagement was impending and no body of the enemy of any consequence was within fifteen or twenty miles. But Gen. McClellan was getting his army in shape for organized inaction, and establishing rigid discipline; and

war was war and sleeping on post could not be allowed. Scott was court-martialed, found guilty and sentenced to be shot, and Gen. McClellan approved the verdict. The promulgation of the sentence occasioned great excitement in the Second and Third Vermont regiments, which formed part of Smith's brigade. Petitions for a pardon for Scott were circulated and signed by hundreds of officers and men. The day for the execution came, the brigade was paraded to see it, and Scott was led out as if for death, when an order of Gen. McClellan's was read, reciting that in view of an expressed wish of President Lincoln that clemency might be extended to the culprit, and of the good character of Scott, and the urgency of the entreaties in his behalf, the General commanding had granted the petition for Scott's pardon; and he was therefore discharged and ordered to return to duty.

Around these simple facts a halo of romance was thrown by the romancers and poets in and out of the army. Scott, they said, was a youth of remarkable intelligence and nerve. He asked for neither pity nor pardon. His comrades begged for his life, but the Generals commanding the brigade were impervious to all entreaties. The kind heart of the President, however, was touched. He resolved to save Scott. He signed and sent out a pardon. Fearing it might not reach the army headquarters, he called the telegraph into use. No answer came; and dreading the consequences of further delay, he dropped important state business; ordered up his carriage and drove with speed over ten miles of dusty roads and under a broiling sun, reaching the spot just in time to stop the shooting, after the deadly guns had been cocked and leveled. Such was the current story. Seven

months later Scott was one of two hundred Vermonters who forded Warwick River at Lee's Mill, carried a Confederate breastwork, fully manned, held it for half an hour against more regiments than there were companies in the battalion; and made an opening through which McClellan might easily have pierced and turned the Confederate line of works around Yorktown, if he had not been bent on remaining and getting up a monster bombardment of the Confederate works which should rival those he had witnessed at Sebastopol in the Crimean War.

Scott was mortally wounded in this affair. The letter writers said that he was the first man that fell; that he received six bullets in his body, that his comrades caught him up and, as his life blood ebbed away, he raised to heaven, amid the din of the battle, the cries of the dying and the shouts of the enemy, a prayer for President Lincoln; saying for himself that he was no coward and was not afraid to die. They added that the smile of gratitude, brought by the thought of Mr. Lincoln's mercy, in his dying moments still illuminated the pale face of his corpse as the burial party laid him, shrouded in his blue coat and army blanket, in a soldier's grave, under a clump of cherry trees in full bloom, by the banks of the Warwick.

The pathos of this story touched the popular heart. It was copied in every northern newspaper. It was retold in glowing verse by American poets. It was made the theme of sermons and speeches. It added warmth and depth to the great love of the people for the memory of the martyr President. It kept its place, as one of the most touching incidents of the war, for thirty years. I found it unimpeached when I wrote the history of the

old First Vermont Brigade. I made a few inquiries of some of the soldiers of the Third Regiment, who confirmed the story, the only discrepancy being that some said that Mr. Lincoln rode up to the firing party in a carriage, while others said he was on horseback. I had not the slightest doubt of the truth of the story and wrote it up in my best style, taking the details largely from a letter written at the time by Capt. F. V. Randall of the Second Vermont Regiment, in which he gave the circumstances of Scott's death and burial as described by a war correspondent of the New York Commercial Advertiser, who claimed to have been an eye witness of the transaction. The story grew with successive reproductions. In the interesting volume of *Personal Recollections of President Lincoln* by the Hon. Lucius E. Chittenden, published by the Harpers in 1891, the romance of the Sleeping Sentinel fills an entire chapter.

At this point Colonel Benedict summarizes Chittenden's story of Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel. He continues:

Few incidents of the War are better vouched for than this. Nevertheless, there are men of high standing, who were in a position to know the facts, who declare that the generals never intended that Scott should be shot and that Mr. Lincoln knew it; that the President did not go to Chain Bridge to save Scott; that he issued no pardon to Scott; and that he approved Gen. McClellan's order remitting the penalty merely as a matter of routine. They say that Mr. Lincoln may have heard of the sentence before it reached him through the official channels and have telegraphed in this, as we know he

did in some other cases, to have the execution of the case suspended till the facts had been submitted to him; but that at most was all.

The witnesses who thus testify are Gen. W. F. Smith, who says that Mr. Lincoln never came to his headquarters at Chain Bridge on this or any other matter; and that his (Lincoln's) approval of the pardon was purely a matter of form; Col. E. M. Hudson, lately deceased, of Gen. McClellan's staff, who was Judge Advocate of the court-martial; and Col. Redfield Proctor, who was then on Gen. Smith's staff; Rev. M. P. Parmlee, who was chaplain of the Third Vermont and on the ground and familiar with the facts, says in a recent letter that he knows that the President did not come to the camp at Chain Bridge, and that he gave that and other facts at variance with the current accounts of the affair to the Poet Janvier, who asked him about the matter before he wrote his somewhat famous poem of *The Sleeping Sentinel*. But the romance had so much greater charm for the poet than the facts, that he discarded the latter.

As regards Scott's death, Dr. Henry Janes, who was the surgeon of the Third Regiment, states that he well remembers Scott's case; that he was shot in the abdomen at Lee's Mill, sank into a state of collapse and died about a day later; that, being in a semi-conscious state he would not have been very likely to make any speeches or offer any prayers; and that he (the doctor) never heard of anything of the sort on Scott's part till he read Janvier's poem!

Thus the bottom seems to drop out of this romance of the Sleeping Sentinel. But the fable has had strong hold of the public heart, and it will undoubtedly long outlive

the belated prosaic correction, if indeed the latter ever obtains general currency.

In a footnote Benedict adds:

> I have been asked to reconcile the statements of these intelligent and veracious witnesses with Mr. Chittenden's *Recollections;* but do not find it easy to do so. There were cases, other than this, in which President Lincoln interfered to postpone or prevent the execution of sentences of court-martial. Perhaps Mr. Chittenden, in the lapse of time since the war, may have confounded in his memory some such other case, with which he may have had some concern, with this case of Scott.

At this point it may be said that for over thirty-one years, or up to the time that Colonel Benedict delivered his Loyal Legion address which I have here in part quoted, the generally accepted belief was that William Scott owed the saving of his life to President Lincoln. However much the many versions of the pardon story differed one from another in minor details, the great central fact, the great dominating idea was always the same in every version. Colonel Benedict's prophesy that the "fable will undoubtedly long outlive the belated prosaic correction" was not without fulfillment for thirty-two years more, or until Doctor Barton published his *Life of Abraham Lincoln* in 1925. Benedict's "belated prosaic correction," as he himself terms it, was heard by a limited number of people who doubtless forgot it straightway; and when it was published the same year, in pamphlet form, it fell still-born from the press. True, it may be found in some of the larger libraries; but the public in general, to say nothing of Lincoln biographers in particular, were ignorant of its existence. It is evident that Doctor Barton

knew nothing of it when he wrote his *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, nor until the newspaper discussion had progressed for several weeks.

During those thirty-two years from 1893 to 1925, stories of Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel, based on various versions but chiefly on Chittenden's, found their way into school books and Lincoln biographies, including Nicholay's *Boy's Life of Abraham Lincoln*. Then, to cap the climax, along came John Drinkwater with the story of the Sleeping Sentinel as a vital part of the play *Abraham Lincoln*, in which the author cut loose from all attempts at historical accuracy and blazed a trail all his own. When, therefore, Dr. William E. Barton appeared on the scene with a passion for purging biography of its romantic element and for "spoiling beautiful lies," to use his own expression, he had a clear field so far as Benedict's "correction" was concerned.

WILLIAM E. BARTON AND THE CONTROVERSY HE STARTED

For several years the late Dr. William E. Barton has been recognized as one of the outstanding authorities on the subject of Lincoln. His books include not only the two-volume *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, but also *The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln*, *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, and many others. When he came to the preparation of his *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, it seems that he wished to include the story of the pardon of the Sleeping Sentinel but, finding that previously published biographies of Lincoln were not absolutely in accord on the subject and that parts of Chittenden's version "would not hold water," he resolved to make a special study of the subject from the original sources. He writes:

> When I began writing my *Life of Lincoln* I supposed the story to be essentially correct. But the differing versions had to be ironed out and for that and every other good reason, I went back to the sources. The further back I went the more I was troubled.
>
> My files show that it was six years ago last April when I got around to my first investigation and had looked up such material as had been discovered in the War Department. It was very meager.
>
> In 1920 I was gathering material on many subjects in the life of Lincoln and I filed what I could obtain on William Scott. Then, when I prepared the first draft of my book in 1921, I went back to the War Department and got some more material which they were able to find

in the light of some things I had discovered. And then, after I had completed this draft and was preparing it for revision, I went back a third time. I never asked the War Department for anything without getting all that they were able to give. I state these details because, with all our search, one important document still eluded us, the actual pardon of Scott. But I had gone far enough to convince myself, almost against my will, that the popular story contained many errors.[1]

Having supplied himself with all the material available from "original sources," Doctor Barton proceeded to write the story of the pardon of the Sleeping Sentinel as follows:

Literature since the war has been rather full of stories of the pardons issued by Lincoln. One of them, particularly, the case of William Scott of Vermont, has become the occasion of much oratory and literature. It comes to us on the authority of Honorable L. E. Chittenden, who was register of the treasury from 1861 to 1865. According to this story Scott, a private in a Vermont regiment, volunteered to act as sentinel in the place of a friend who was sick and so was awake all night, the first time in his life. On the very next night he himself was called out to act as sentinel. On this second night he went to sleep at his post. His commanding officer, General W. F. Smith, known to the soldiers as "Baldy," felt that the sentence of the court-martial must be inflicted and that sentence was death. Some of his comrades went to Chittenden, who was a Vermonter, and offered to hire him as attorney to plead the case of Scott in an appeal to the president. Chittenden refused their money, but went with them to Lincoln, who pardoned the boy.

Scott became a more than ordinarily faithful and brave soldier and died nobly in battle.

Mr. Chittenden, while in ordinary matters a truthful man, was a very unreliable historian. Charles Francis Adams had occasion to review one incident recorded by Mr. Chittenden, to discover the "residuum" of truth in it. When Mr. Adams was done with it, the "residuum" was about as great as the speck of soapy water that remains after the pricking of a soap bubble. Not that Mr. Chittenden was the greatest liar in Washington; he was not. But he was one of many men who colored their memories with their imagination until their accounts became wholly unsafe as historical data.

It would be interesting to know whether any soldier was actually shot to death during the Civil War for going to sleep on guard duty. Thus far the War Department has not found any such case. . . . It would appear quite improbable that a capital sentence should have been imposed where there were so many and such mitigating circumstances as are assembled in the popular story of William Scott. The record does not show that Scott offered in his own defense any such evidence. Apparently he was not required to stay awake all night, much less two successive nights. He was one of three men stationed at a given point, dividing the night into three watches. Between three and four o'clock in the morning the officer of the guard found all three asleep. There was no dispute as to the facts. Scott, having had two-thirds of a night's sleep and being charged with responsibility for an important post, went to sleep on duty. His two companions had a right to sleep. He was the guilty man. The prisoner, though he pleaded "Not guilty," offered no defense and produced no witnesses.

Apparently there were no mitigating circumstances. The rules of war provide that "The fact that the accused had been previously overtaxed by excessive guard duty is not a defense, although evidence to that effect may be received in extenuation of the offense." Apparently there was no such evidence, except such as was later manufactured by sentimental authors for the benefit of posterity.

Who pardoned the prisoner or mitigated his sentence does not appear of record. There is no evidence that Lincoln ever knew of the case, though he may have done so. If any such case came to his knowledge, with such mitigating circumstances, it is easy to guess what he would have done.

What we know is that Scott did not die. The sentence of death was pronounced and may have had its salutary effect upon sleepy young Vermonters; but he did not die. A petition was signed by officers and privates of his regiment, this petition being addressed to General Smith. Whether he, or some superior officer, or the president pardoned Scott, or whether the sentence was mitigated, is not of record. The fact we know is that whoever exercised mercy in this case appears to have been justified. William Scott, a native of Groton, Vermont, enrolled as a private in Company K, Third Vermont Regiment, was shot in the chest in the battle of Lee's Mills, in the vicinity of Yorktown, Virginia, April 16, 1862, and died the following day. Perhaps Lincoln pardoned him; he pardoned many men less worthy. It is much more likely that it was not necessary to appeal to Lincoln; if his pardon had been by the president, some record should be available. We do not know. Mr. Chittenden was a truthful man and a lawyer of experience, but he was a very inaccurate historian.[2]

Doctor Barton's book came from the press in the late spring of 1925. The general excellence of the work was such as to preclude for some time any considerable criticism of his treatment of the Scott incident. Indeed, to the generation born since the Civil War, the story of the Sleeping Sentinel was nothing but an inconsequential incident in the career of a man around whose name, like that of Washington, legends were expected to gather. The Washington cherry tree story was a fable. Why should it be considered unreasonable to assume that the Lincoln sleeping sentinel story was a fable also? Furthermore, the so-called intellectual readers were welcoming the historians and biographers of the new order, whose mission, or ambition, was and is to purge history of its romantic elements and have done once for all with that insipid hero worship which had been so characteristic of the earlier writers of the Parson Weems type.

It may seem a little strange that, in view of the great amount of material available on the pardon of the Sleeping Sentinel, an expert in historical research like Doctor Barton should have made the error of saying that there is no evidence that Lincoln ever heard of the Scott case. Of course his mistake was due to the fact that he disregarded the newspapers contemporaneous with the event, and confined his search wholly to the files of the War Department. However that may be, when Doctor Barton returned in the late summer of 1925 from a trip abroad, his attention was called to the pardon itself which his six years of search had failed to uncover. Writing of his error, a year later, Doctor Barton says:

> My *Life of Lincoln* emerged from the press while I was abroad, and soon after my return I tried again and at that time I discovered the pardon of Scott, signed by General McClellan. The book was out, but I freely told

correspondents, as early as August 31, 1925,[3] that Lincoln did have knowledge of the case, but that General McClellan issued the pardon.

A year later some one else discovered the pardon, communicated the fact to the press and, reading my frank acknowledgment, gloried in the fact that I had been forced to acknowledge that I was in error. So I had been, in a wholly minor and unimportant point. But in the main I was more than ever correct, for the new evidence showed conclusively that Lincoln did not issue the pardon and that it came by way of the military authorities. And meantime the popular story had a few more holes shot in it.[4]

Notwithstanding the fact that Doctor Barton here states that he made this correction as early as August 31, 1925, his previous assertion that "There is no proof that Lincoln ever heard of the case," persisted. It was a statement to this effect in an article in the *Boston Post* of August 13, 1926, that started the trouble. A portion of the article is as follows:

ANOTHER LINCOLN STORY DISPROVED

Following the revelation that the famous Mrs. Bixby letter, written by Lincoln, one of the great masterpieces of literature, was based on the entirely erroneous claim that Mrs. Bixby of Boston had lost five sons in the war, another cherished legend of the Lincoln era has been disproved.

Dr. William E. Barton, author of the latest biography of Lincoln, written after nearly fifty years' study of Lincoln's life, has investigated the famous case of William Scott of Groton, Vermont, who enlisted in K Company, Third Vermont.

> The story of William Scott was, as legend had it, one of the most tender and touching episodes of White House history. It appeared in school books, was made the text of innumerable speeches and sermons and caught the imagination of the country.

Then follows the story of William Scott, condensed from Chittenden's version, with two notable exaggerations. It is stated that Scott had been without sleep for forty-eight hours. Chittenden nowhere makes this statement. It is also stated that Chittenden told how he appealed to Lincoln, giving the President the facts, and how the tears rolled down the President's cheeks at the hardheartedness of the military authorities. This also is not according to Chittenden. He nowhere tells of the President's weeping. The narrative continues:

> There is not the slightest evidence that President Lincoln ever heard of Scott's case. There is nothing to show that he ever issued a pardon to Scott. The story told by Mr. Chittenden is flatly contradicted by the records.

To this story in the *Boston Post* Mr. Luke E. Ferriter of Brattleboro, Vermont, a comrade of William Scott in the Third Vermont, emphatically took exception. In an interview with a reporter of the same newspaper in which the foregoing statements appeared, Mr. Ferriter expressed himself as follows:

> It's true, it's true. Doctor Barton wasn't on the scene, but I was there as a member of the firing squad. I was one of the guards picked to shoot Scott, and possibly the only man living who can tell the whole truth

about the story, both about Scott's sleeping on duty and his facing death and getting an eleventh hour pardon from President Lincoln.

We were stationed at the time at the Chain Bridge, fifteen miles above Washington. It was in August, 1861, within a few months after the start of the rebellion. I had run away from home at the age of seventeen and walked thirty-six miles to Springfield, Vt., to enlist in the Third Vermont. Col. William ("Baldy") Smith, a nephew of ex-Gov. Gregory Smith, was colonel of our regiment. On account of my youth and lack of my parents' consent, I enlisted under the assumed name of Charles Smith, as all of my war papers will show. Our company was detailed for picket duty at Chain Bridge on the Potomac — then the line between the North and the South, and an important position, for Baltimore was then almost as much of a rebel city as Richmond, and there was smuggling of much contraband across fords in the Potomac River.

Myself, William Scott, and a corporal whose name I have forgotten, were detailed to sentry duty along the Potomac shore in the vicinity of Chain Bridge. Scott and I and the corporal had a brush hut under which we slept when off duty, and at night we three shared the role of vidette or sentinel in rotation, each for two-hour periods, while the other two slept.

On the night in question, I had the watch from ten to twelve o'clock, and Scott from twelve to two. He came forward to relieve me at midnight, and I retired to the hut with the corporal. Soon afterwards, about one o'clock, the officer of the guard was making the guard rounds as w as usual, to see that the sentries were at their posts.

The first we knew they were waking us in our hut. "I want a man out here," shouted the officer. "Your guard has gone to sleep and we have him under arrest."

I answered, and went to take Scott's place.

When we all got into camp the next day, the corporal and I were taken before the court-martial as witnesses. It was a short hearing. Scott had no defense, whatever, but simply admitted he had fallen asleep in spite of himself. He was sentenced to suffer the death penalty, and the date of his execution set for Sept. 8.

The case at once threw the camp into a commotion, and attracted attention far and wide, for it was the first case of the kind to come up since the war had begun. Notwithstanding what Doctor Barton says about "no man ever having suffered the death penalty for sleeping on sentry duty," the Army Regulations provided that penalty, for the offense was one which exposed the whole army and was almost as treacherous as treason. Nobody knew whether the penalty would be enforced, but they expected it would be. The sentence was approved by General Smith.

Chaplain Parmelee of our regiment at once interested himself in the case, and a petition was signed and sent to Washington. I don't know whether it ever reached Lincoln, but on the eve of Sept. 8, the report reached camp that the President had pardoned our comrade Scott.

Yet, to our surprise, at nine o'clock the next morning, companies of the Third Vermont, the Second Vermont, the Thirty-third New York, and the Sixth Maine, and a squadron of cavalry were drawn up in hollow square for the proceedings of an execution. I was so unlucky as to be drawn as one of the men to do the shooting. There

were handed out six blank cartridges and one loaded one, all of which were to be shot, so no one would know who fired the fatal bullet.

The troops fell in and we arranged ourselves near the stage road between Georgetown and Halifax. We of the guard stood on a little elevation of land, and between us and the point of execution lay a little valley across which we were to shoot. The prisoner Scott was led out and a white cap pulled over his head. He was trembling, and a white shield was sewed over his heart as a target for the guard. We were all shaking in nervousness at the duty before us, when suddenly the adjutant stepped forward and read the pardon.

And there was no disputing that Lincoln was there. He stepped out from the background. We stacked arms and cheered for him, so pleased were we that Scott had been pardoned. He took off his hat in recognition of us, and we cheered again and again. We did not know, of course, what action he personally had taken, but we heard it said in camp that Lincoln had made a personal request to General McClellan and that McClellan had made a similar request of General Smith.

It was the first case of the kind in the war, and it was a great lesson to all of us. We saw to it that we never fell asleep on sentry duty.

As might be expected, this statement of Mr. Ferriter's evoked a reply from Doctor Barton. Within a day or two several correspondents had come to the defense of Mr. Ferriter, and for the next six weeks the controversy raged in many newspapers in the north-eastern section of the country, particularly in those of New York City, Boston, and Vermont. The newspapers giving most attention to the dis-

pute were the *New York Times*, the *Boston Herald*, the *Burlington Free Press*, the *Brattleboro Reformer*, and the *Barre Times*. In this controversy Doctor Barton stood almost alone against a legion. Some of his opponents defended Chittenden's version of the pardon story; others stood behind Benedict's first version; others brought out Janvier's poem, and insisted that this represented the truth, and nothing but the truth; one correspondent, at least, quoted Ambler's version as proof that Lincoln personally brought the pardon just as the guns were leveled to shoot Scott to death; still others, like Mr. Ferriter, were eye witnesses, or had heard the story from eye witnesses, and were thus able to add their original contributions. As might be expected, there were numerous discrepancies in the claims of these opponents of Doctor Barton, over minor details. They were all agreed, however, on one thing, namely, that President Lincoln pardoned William Scott or at least was responsible for the pardon.

The material which the newspapers printed in those six weeks of controversy would fill a volume and cannot to any great extent be reproduced here. One contribution, however, written in fairness and frankness, throws so much light on an important phase of the dispute that it cannot be omitted. Under date of Sept. 10, 1926, Mrs. Bessie Chittenden Richards wrote to the *Boston Herald:*

> As a daughter of L. E. Chittenden, whose account of President Lincoln and "The Sleeping Sentinel" Dr. W. E. Barton has so violently attacked, may I add a few words to the discussion in your columns? My father was in close touch during his residence in Washington as Register of the Treasury with Vermont soldiers, who made his home a headquarters. He was also on con-

fidential terms with President Lincoln, who came frequently to his home in the informal manner possible in those days. He wrote this account, not from historical documents, to which he did not have access, but from his own memories of conversations with the President and the Vermont soldiers. He did not claim to write a historical record accurate in every detail, and there are doubtless minor errors such as a man might make in writing of events thirty years after. The substantial accuracy of the main facts is all he claims. I have heard him tell this story again and again and was his amanuensis in transcribing his version of it. It was gone over most carefully and no one who knew my father can doubt his desire to give a truthful rendering. To claim that he made up his account of his visit to the President with members of Scott's regiment is an absurdity. Doubtless many others were working for his pardon and deserve full credit for what they did. Of my father's small part in it there can be no doubt. Doctor Barton will have hard work in killing the story of the "Sleeping Sentinel" while Vermonters live who knew other sides of this incident than those contained in public records, and who are also acquainted with the character of the man who vouches for an aspect of it outside the range of any possible knowledge of Doctor Barton.

In the course of the controversy, partly through the information that was hurled at him by his opponents, and partly through further research which he now conducted on a more practical basis, Doctor Barton changed his position in several respects. This is made evident from an examination of his article in the *New York Times* of October 3, 1926 — an article in which, as has already been observed, Doctor

Barton gave his final word upon the subject. In this article he differed from the position which he took in his *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, in four respects:

First, Doctor Barton admitted that President Lincoln knew about Scott's case, for the pardon itself, which Doctor Barton's six years' search had failed to locate, stated that "The President of the United States has expressed a wish that . . . mercy be extended to the criminal."

Second, Doctor Barton readily admitted that the unnamed soldier referred to in General McClellan's letter to his wife was Scott: "Mr. Lincoln came this morning to ask me to pardon a man that I had ordered to be shot."

Third, Doctor Barton admitted that at nine o'clock on the morning of Sept. 9, 1861, the regiments were drawn up to hear the pardon of William Scott read, if not indeed ostensibly to see him shot. Previously he had stated, referring to Mr. Ferriter's claim that he was of the firing squad: "As for Mr. Ferriter's having been detailed on Monday morning to shoot Scott, the Washington papers of that morning were full of the news that Scott had been pardoned on Sunday. It is preposterous that with the whole army knowing of the pardon and with Scott already a free man, there should have been any such comedy as a drawing up of the army to see him shot. Mr. Ferriter has simply mixed his memories with his imagination."[5]

Fourth, Doctor Barton admitted that President Lincoln had heard of the case previous to the time when Major Ridenour called on him with the petition which General Smith had forwarded from the encampment: "Probably Chittenden and others had mentioned it to him, and evidently someone had told Mrs. Lincoln."[6] Previously, both in his biography of Lincoln and in his communications in the

early stages of the controversy, he had placed no credence whatever in Chittenden.

But although Doctor Barton made all these admissions, he still maintained that President Lincoln's part was simply to make request for Scott's life when asked to do so by General Smith, after the brigade had had its needed scare, and that he did this simply "as a matter of form." This conclusion was based, not upon anything which Doctor Barton had discovered as an original investigator, but wholly upon Colonel Benedict's "correction" in his Loyal Legion address, to which Doctor Barton's attention had evidently been called in the late stages of the controversy. Driven from one position to another, he was glad to take refuge behind the statements of this seemingly authentic historian.

In the meantime, on Sept. 16, 1926, the *Boston Herald* had closed its columns to further discussion. The editorial entitled "One Question Settled," to which reference has already been made in the introduction of this work, was based not upon anything which Doctor Barton had written but wholly upon Colonel Benedict's "correction," which the *Herald* characterized as an "interesting and positively conclusive document."

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[1]*New York Times*, October 3, 1926. Used by permission of the publishers.

[2]From *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* by William E. Barton, Copyright 1925, used by special permission of the publishers, The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

[3]Although Dr. Barton here states that as early as Aug. 31, he told correspondents that Lincoln had knowledge of the case, the *Springfield Union* (Mass.) of Oct. 7, in reporting a Lincoln lecture of Dr. Barton, delivered in Westfield on Oct. 6, reads: "There was such a soldier involved, but the case did not reach Lincoln."

[4]*New York Times*, October 3, 1926. Used by permission of the publishers.

[5]*Boston Herald*, September 3, 1926.

[6]*New York Times*, October 3, 1926. Used by permission of the publishers.

TWO GRAINS OF WHEAT

We may well wonder what the plain, humble, good-hearted lad from West Groton, Vermont would have thought, had he known that his ill-timed fit of drowsiness would have made him the subject of so many conflicting excursions of tongue and pen. Of what a prodigious amount of controversy and ill feeling the world would have been spared if William Scott, in writing to his Groton neighbors, had told them, not of the muddy roads and negro lasses of Virginia, or of his concern for the welfare of the souls of his correspondents, but of what happened to him personally from August 30 to September 9, 1861. Perhaps it may be assumed that he wrote to his family that he was indebted to President Lincoln for his life. It certainly may be assumed that he did not give them the contrary notion, or Thomas Scott never would have made that pilgrimage to the White House to express his thanks personally to President Lincoln. Be that as it may, let us pass over such matters of speculation and come directly to our task — that of evaluating the material in the foregoing pages of this book. What can we believe concerning the pardon of William Scott? Was Abraham Lincoln a real actor in this drama or was he, as Colonel Benedict and Doctor Barton would have us believe, a mere dummy? What are the "two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff"?

I

In considering the question of the pardon of William Scott, let us in the first place examine the document which was read to him in the presence of the assembled regiments

on Sept. 9, 1861. A glance gives us the information that the pardon was issued "by S. Williams, Assistant Adjutant General, by command of Major-General McClellan." The reasons for its being issued are as follows: first, the earnest appeal of the "commanding officers of the brigade, the regiment and the company of the command, together with many other officers and privates of his regiment"; second, the expressed wish of the President of the United States; third, the "inexperience of the condemned as a soldier," and his "previous good conduct and good character."

The last of these three reasons can be taken for granted and passed over; it never was a point in the controversy. When we weigh the other two reasons in the balance there is no question as to how the beam will tip. The earnest appeal of the officers and privates of the brigade was the request of men inferior in rank to General McClellan; while the expressed wish of the President of the United States was the request of a man superior to General McClellan, which request, coming as it did from the commander in chief of the army and navy of the United States, was equivalent to an order. In a very real way, therefore, judging from the language of the document itself, it can be said that President Lincoln pardoned William Scott.

But Colonel Benedict in his Loyal Legion address asserted, and Doctor Barton reiterated the assertion, that General Smith did not intend that Scott should suffer the death penalty, that he delayed action in order to give the brigade a much-needed scare, that President Lincoln was only the tool of General Smith, only a dummy character in a sort of Punch and Judy show, and that he was willing to help out with a request for Scott's pardon when asked to do so by the military authorities, and that his action at most was "only a matter of form.'

Let it be granted that General Smith did not want Scott to be executed. His statement to that effect to Colonel Benedict some thirty years subsequent to the pardon of Scott would seem to be corroborated by the contemporaneous evidence in the pardon itself —"The commanding officers of the brigade, the regiment, and the company have earnestly appealed to the Major-General commanding, to spare the life of the offender." General Smith, of course, was the commander of the brigade.

Let it also be granted that General Smith was honest in his statement to Colonel Benedict that President Lincoln's part in bringing about Scott's pardon was "purely a matter of form." It follows, therefore, that General Smith must, in some way, have communicated his plan for Scott's pardon to President Lincoln, or at least must have made an attempt to do so. We have no record as to how this was done. What we know is that Chaplain Parmelee of the Third Vermont Regiment prepared a petition to General Smith, asking for Scott's pardon; that this petition was signed by Mr. Parmelee and 191 other men, including some minor officers, but by none of the higher officers; that a petition, "numerously signed," presumably the one prepared and circulated by Chaplain Parmelee, was presented to President Lincoln "at a late hour" of the afternoon of September 8, by Major Ridenour, and that President Lincoln told Major Ridenour that the execution would not take place on the following day.[1]

It may be assumed that when Major Ridenour called on President Lincoln, bearing the petition, he was on his way to General McClellan, inasmuch as General McClellan who had confirmed the findings of the Court Martial, and approved the execution of Scott, would be the logical person to issue the official pardon. If General Smith had planned to have

President Lincoln request the pardon of Scott "merely as a matter of form," to add impressiveness to the procedure, so that it could be said, for the benefit of the morale of the army, that nothing short of the request of the President of the United States had saved Scott, he doubtless sent his recommendation to that effect by the hand of Major Ridenour, the bearer of the petition. If there was such a message, it was written on a separate piece of paper, or delivered verbally, for there is no message to that effect written anywhere on the petition.

Perhaps Major Ridenour delivered such a message verbally; perhaps he did not get a chance to do so. And why? Simply because President Lincoln, not knowing that General Smith wanted Scott pardoned, and not knowing that he, the President, was to act a dummy part under the state management of the military authorities, *had already played a real part*, of which General Smith knew nothing at the time, if indeed he ever knew at all. President Lincoln, in the early forenoon of the same day, had already gone to General McClellan and, as commander in chief of the army and navy, had given orders to his subordinate, General McClellan, to issue a pardon to William Scott. To repeat the quotation from General McClellan's letter of September 8, to his wife: "Mr. Lincoln came this morning to ask me to pardon a man I had ordered to be shot." It is more than likely that when Major Ridenour brought up the question of Scott's pardon in his late afternoon or evening interview with Mr. Lincoln, the President said something like this: "I have already attended to this matter personally. This morning I called on General McClellan and gave him orders for William Scott's pardon. Scott will not be executed tomorrow."

This is a point which has never heretofore been made

Camp Advance Va. Sept 8 1861

To Brig. Genl. Smith

We, the undersigned, Officers and privates of the Vermont 3d Reg. would most respectfully and earnestly petition that the life of William Scott, private of Company K. now under sentence of death, may be spared

D. T. Corbin, Capt. Co. C
S. E. Bennett Capt. Co. A
A. C. West — Capt. Co B
L. C. Barrington " " D
Thos F. House " " H
Lorenzo D. Allen Capt Co G
Rhd. Vilson Capt
W. F. Corey Lt Co H

M. P. Pannelen Chaplain
H. W. Floyd Co. F

J. H. Calyon 2nd Lieut Co B
R. H. Stott 3rd Lieut Co H
J. H. Hutchinson 1st Lt Co G
Moses S. Brown 2nd Lt Co G
S. A. Chandler 2d Lt Co. F
S. G. Henessant 1st Co C
A. C. Pearce 2d Lt Co H
E. M. Noyes 2d Lieut Co. C
A. T. Smith 1 Lieut Co K.

1861 forwarded by Brig. Genl. W. F. Smith Chas. Mundell Adj

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Petition of Officers and Men for Scott's Pardon
(Only first page reproduced)

clear. It is the reef upon which Colonel Benedict and Doctor Barton both foundered. Colonel Benedict, both in his *Vermont in the Civil War*, and in his "correction" which was set forth in his Loyal Legion address, makes no mention of this all-important statement of General McClellan's in his letter to Mrs. McClellan. It is evident that Colonel Benedict never had seen this; for if he had, he never would have agreed with General Smith that Mr. Lincoln's part was "merely a matter of form." Doctor Barton, on the other hand, knew of General McClellan's statement. That is to say that he found out about it after the newspaper controversy had gotten well under way, *but he misplaces it in the sequence of events.* In his *New York Times* article — his final word upon the subject — he disposes of it thus:

> Lincoln was concerned about this case and after Major Ridenour had called at the White House on Sunday, Lincoln walked over to McClellan's house just to be sure that all was right. McClellan sat on his regal throne and looked down on the President whom he despises and that night wrote to his wife:
>
> "I had another bouquet this morning, one from the Lady President. Mr. Lincoln came this morning to ask me to pardon a man whom I had ordered to be shot, suggesting that I could give as the reason that it was by request of the Lady President."
>
> McClellan had already signed the pardon, "at the request of the President."[2]

Had he, indeed? It is not probable that any pardon was issued by command of General McClellan until his attention was called to a person who should be pardoned. How did General McClellan know of the desire to have William Scott

pardoned? President Lincoln told him *on the morning* of September 8, and Major Ridenour told him *on the evening* of the same day. If President Lincoln was the first to tell him, is it probable that when the President made that early Sunday morning call, "McClellan had already signed the pardon 'at the request of the President,'" when the information upon which that pardon was supposed to have been based, according to Doctor Barton, was not to reach General McClellan until the visit of Major Ridenour several hours later in the day?

And so this last and greatest mistake of Doctor Barton will have to take its place with the other mistakes to which I have called attention. The other mistakes were corrected by Doctor Barton; this one was not. It is indeed his greatest mistake, for upon this point rests the solution of the all-important question as to whether it was President Lincoln or the military authorities who took the initiative in bringing about the pardon of William Scott. The evidence is conclusive that it was President Lincoln.

II

That President Lincoln acted in good faith and that he really believed that his action had saved Scott and that the general public shared that belief may reasonably be deduced from an examination of all the evidence.

Every newspaper in Washington and New York which commented editorially on the incident gave President Lincoln credit for the pardon. "The Presidential pardon," "The President interfered and granted a pardon," "Executive clemency," were some of the expressions used.

After the pardon was read to Scott in the presence of the assembled regiments of General Smith's command, the

cheering was for President Lincoln. Mr. Ferriter's statement to that effect at the time of his tilt with Doctor Barton is corroborated both by the contemporary evidence contained in Captain Randall's letter to the *Green Mountain Freeman*, written the day after the pardon was read to the troops, already quoted, and by the news despatches which stated that the regiments "heartily expressed their appreciation of this act of Executive clemency."

Again, when Murdoch, the elocutionist, recited Janvier's *Sleeping Sentinel*, first in the White House before a select company which included President and Mrs. Lincoln, and again on the evening of the same day, in the Senate Chamber, before a large and distinguished audience which also included President and Mrs. Lincoln, neither President Lincoln nor anybody else objected to the poem either then or for thirty years afterwards. Twice in a single day, therefore, President Lincoln publicly took credit for Scott's pardon. Moreover, the Washington newspapers reporting the Murdoch readings gave credit for the pardon to President Lincoln, the *Evening Star* stating, "Among the pieces read by Mr. Murdoch was one entitled *The Sleeping Sentinel* which was particularly interesting from the fact that the President, who had pardoned the 'sleeping sentinel'— upon which act the production was founded — was present."

At the time of the newspaper controversy the question of President Lincoln's good faith was raised. One writer commenting on the Murdoch readings stated:

> This was early in 1863, or about sixteen months after the pardon of Scott, and about nine months after his death at the battle of Lee's Mill. If this story was not true, in the main, how could the great President twice listen to its recital with no word of protest? Was Lin-

coln such a hypocrite as to accept credit where he did not deserve it? . . . The fact remains that the Lincoln-Scott story was well circulated for at least two years before Lincoln's death. If the story was not true, Lincoln had abundant opportunity to have enlightened the public mind on the question and Lincoln's critics had an equally good opportunity to have made capital of the President's hypocrisy.[3]

To this Doctor Barton replied:

That, I think, is a fair question, and I asked it myself before I heard any one else ask it.

My answer, first, is that Lincoln pardoned so many men I have no idea whatever that he kept a list or knew the name of half of them after they were free. I do not imagine he knew whether this was one of his pardons or not. But, in any event, Lincoln knew that he was getting plenty of criticism for pardons by January, 1863, and if any one wanted to present the matter in a kindlier form there was no reason why he should be displeased. But, thirdly, Lincoln knew the difference between poetry and prose, and knew that any such event must have a degree of poetic license. I believe that this same Prof. Murdoch recited before Gen. Phil Sheridan and had in his program that night Thomas Buchanan Read's poem, *Sheridan's Ride.* I have no information that leads me to believe that Phil Sheridan rose and reproved the reciter for a stanza like this:

Still sprung from those swift hoofs thundering south
The dust like the smoke from the cannon's mouth,
Or the trail of a comet, sweeping faster and faster,
Foreboding to traitors the doom of disaster;

The heart of the steed and the heart of the master
Were beating like prisoners assaulting their walls,
and so on.

I have no reason to believe that Phil arose and said that there was no dust, for it had recently rained; and that the hoofs of his black horse bore no resemblance to thunder; that Winchester was not twenty miles away, and that he had no business to have been there, anyway.

I do not pretend to know why Lincoln permitted Janvier's poem to go unrebuked, but I suspect it was because he had good horse sense and knew the difference between poetry and prose.[4]

The fact that the newspaper, in which Doctor Barton's letter appeared, within a day or two closed its columns to further discussion made an answer impossible. But now it can be said that President Lincoln, with the excellent memory with which he is always credited, could not have confounded the Scott case with that of any other soldier. Scott's offense occurred near the national capital, at the beginning of the war, when every bit of news was widely circulated. It was the first case of its kind to be taken seriously, and the only case of its kind during the war to attract national attention.

Furthermore, Abraham Lincoln knew, and Doctor Barton ought to have known, that in a narrative poem of an historical nature, poetic license can have to do, not with the heart or great central fact of the story, but with minor details. Here Doctor Barton compares a minor detail of *Sheridan's Ride* with the very heart of the *Sleeping Sentinel.* Whether Sheridan's horse kicked dust or mud; whether Winchester was twenty or forty miles away, are questions of minor importance. The essential fact is that Sheridan got

from Winchester to the panic-stricken army and led it back to victory. Sheridan did not arise and rebuke the reader of the poem, because the heart of the poem was true. Likewise, whether President Lincoln raced to the encampment in his coach and arrived just in time to stop the execution of Scott, as Janvier and Ambler state, or whether he went there in the evening of the day before, as we might infer from Chittenden's story and are positively told in Captain Randall's letter, or whether he never went to the encampment at all, is a question of minor importance. The essential fact is that President Lincoln cared enough for this condemned soldier as to assume sole responsibility in the disposition of his case; that he took the trouble to make a special visit to General McClellan to order Scott's pardon. The reason why neither Lincoln nor anybody else objected to Janvier's poem was because the heart of it was true. President Lincoln believed that he himself had saved Scott. Furthermore, when Major Ridenour called on President Lincoln for the purpose of presenting the petition from the encampment, the fact that the President told him that Scott would not be executed is conclusive proof that Lincoln himself had already attended to the case.

Photostat of the Petition furnished by the Honorable Charles A Plumley, Member of Congress.

[1]*National Republican*, September 9, 1861.

[2]Used by permission of the *New York Times*.

[3]*Boston Herald*, Sept. 9, 1926.

[4]*Boston Herald*, Sept. 10, 1926.

THE CHAFF REWINNOWED

AVING considered the outstanding fact of our subject, let us now turn our attention to a few minor questions which are featured in one or another of the many versions of the story of Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel.

I

Granting that President Lincoln gave orders to General McClellan for Scott's pardon before Major Ridenour brought the petition down from the encampment at Chain Bridge, it follows that somebody must have gone to President Lincoln to intercede for Scott's life. Who told President Lincoln about Scott or plead for his life?

We have seen that Lucius E. Chittenden, while somewhat indefinite as to dates, is quite definite in his assertion that comrades of the condemned Scott went to him as a lawyer and fellow Vermonter to intercede for Scott and that he led these distressed soldiers to President Lincoln, "the only man in Washington who could save their comrade"; and that the President promised to attend to the matter personally. We also have the testimony of Mr. Chittenden's daughter, Mrs. Bessie Chittenden Richards, who says of her father: "To claim that he made up his account of his visit to the President with members of Scott's regiment is an absurdity." And finally, Dr. William E. Barton, Chittenden's severest critic, stated in his final disposition of the matter: "Probably Chittenden and others had mentioned it to him." From the foregoing statements it may reasonably be assumed that President Lincoln's order for Scott's pardon was due to Chittenden's intercession.

It will be recalled that Colonel Benedict, in a footnote appended to his Loyal Legion address, adds:

> I have been asked to reconcile the statements of these intelligent and veracious witnesses with Mr. Chittenden's *Recollections;* but do not find it easy to do so. There were cases, other than this, in which President Lincoln interfered to postpone or prevent the execution of sentence of court-martial. Perhaps Mr. Chittenden, in the lapse of time since the war, may have confounded in his memory some such other case, with which he may have had some concern, with this case of Scott.

In addition to the statement of Mrs. Richards and the belated admission of Doctor Barton, already quoted, it may be said that it would have been impossible for Mr. Chittenden to have confounded the Scott case with that of any other soldier for the same reasons that I have given with respect to President Lincoln. Thus it would seem that a second flaw is found in Colonel Benedict's "correction."

II

The question very naturally arises; Why did not General Smith or some one else, who held the opinion that President Lincoln did not have as much to do with Scott's pardon as has been almost universally believed, make an earlier correction of the alleged error? Why all the silence from 1861, the date of the pardon, to 1893, the approximate date of General Smith's enlightening conversation with Colonel Benedict? Why, especially in view of the fact that so much publicity had been given to this incident?

While no one can answer this question with absolute certainty, it seems to me that a fairly reasonable conjecture can be made.

It is agreed that General Smith did not wish to have Scott suffer the death penalty. Presumably he was glad to have it appear that the President had interceded, in order to add impressiveness to the scene. Presumably, also, he was glad to have the responsibility for making a decision in so important a matter, and thus establishing a precedent, placed on the shoulders of the President. He was, therefore, willing to let President Lincoln have full credit for the pardon so long as his own reputation was not impaired. However, when Mr. Chittenden published his *Recollections of President Lincoln and His Administration* in 1891, General Smith's position was unquestionably given the wrong interpretation. He was represented by Mr. Chittenden as being impervious to any entreaty on Scott's behalf. It is quite probable that General Smith, on learning of Mr. Chittenden's treatment of the case, remembered after thirty years that he (Smith) never intended that Scott should be executed, and gave that information to Colonel Benedict who, on learning of Chittenden's error in that respect, concluded that Chittenden's whole story was a fabrication or that he had confounded the case of Scott with that of some other soldier.

And is there not some reason after all for Chittenden's belief? General Smith, according to his own statement to Colonel Benedict, withheld recommendation for clemency "in order that the brigade might have a much needed scare." No one knew what would happen; there was no precedent; but there is no doubt that most people shared the belief of the *New York Times* that "the sentence in Scott's case will be fully carried out." Is it to be wondered that comrades of Scott, despairing of any hope of mercy from the seemingly inflexible Smith, should go to Chittenden, their fellow Vermonter, for help, and that both Chittenden and the Presi-

dent, knowing of Smith's inflexibility, believed that Scott was doomed unless the President interfered? Yes, indeed, Chittenden had sufficient reason for his belief that General Smith wanted Scott's blood.

III

Had Scott been on sentry duty the night previous to his offense, in consequence of which he more easily succumbed to sleep? The tradition in Groton, Vermont, and among Scott's comrades who returned from the war was that he had. Doctor Barton says: "Apparently there was no such evidence, except such as was later manufactured by sentimental authors" (doubtless referring to Chittenden) "for the benefit of posterity." If Doctor Barton meant that no such evidence was brought forth at the trial, he was right. Otherwise he was wrong. Both the diary of Henry Herrick, written on September 9, 1861, and the letter of Captain Randall of September 10, 1861 — contemporary evidence of the first importance — state that Scott had been on guard for two successive nights.

At the time of the controversy Mr. E. L. Smith of Barre, Vermont wrote: "William Scott had two brothers in Company B of the Sixth Vermont Regiment, to which I belonged in Company G, Company B being on our left, Scott was soon pointed out to me and I often saw him walking about with his brothers. The second year after the war ended I, in conversation with Ozias Thompson who then lived in Barre, found that he was in Company K, Third Vermont Regiment, and he told me that he was the orderly sergeant of the company, that he always blamed himself for allowing Scott to go on duty after having been on duty the previous night."[1]

Furthermore, as we have seen, Captain Isaac Frazier, a member of the court-martial, and the only member — according to his own statement — to vote against the sentence "to be shot dead" wrote: "Knowing that fatigue, added to several days of physical suffering, had rendered the otherwise able soldier unfit for the tedious nightwatch, I believed that some other punishment was advisable."

If Scott had done double guard duty, as contemporary evidence shows, why was not this fact brought out at the trial, inasmuch as the rules provide that "The fact that the accused had been previously overtaxed by excessive guard duty is not a defense, although evidence to that effect may be received in extenuation of the offense"?

Again it must be emphasized that this was the first trial for this offense. There was no precedent. Doubtless neither William Scott nor any of his intimate friends realized the gravity of the situation or thought for a moment that this first offense would be taken seriously, until judgment was passed. Was not this the reason that those friends of Scott, who so earnestly appealed to Chittenden, stated that the trial had not been fair? The trial evidently was fair. Scott's friends who should have been witnesses in his behalf came to their senses too late.

IV

Did President Lincoln visit the encampment of General Smith's brigade on the morning of September 9?

Mr. Ferriter says: "There was no disputing that Lincoln was there. He stepped out from the background. We stacked arms and cheered for him, so pleased were we that Scott had been pardoned. He took off his hat in recognition of us and we cheered again and again."

Mr. Janvier states in his poem that the President arrived

just in time to stop the execution of Scott. But Colonel Benedict tells us that Chaplain Parmelee gave Janvier the facts in the case, stating among other things that the President was not there, but that Janvier preferred the more romantic version for his poem. Sergeant Ambler, as we have observed, also claims to have seen the President as he came upon the field.

A reasonable conclusion is that President Lincoln was not present at the time and place set for Scott's execution. Doctor Barton is right in saying that if the President had enacted the movie stunt as described by Janvier, the Washington newspapers would have had vivid reports of it in their columns. There was no need of Mr. Lincoln's presence, for he had attended to the matter the day before. The official pardon which was read to Scott on the morning of September 9 bore the date of September 8. We must conclude, therefore, that Janvier made use of poetic license; that Ambler, forgetting the details of the affair, refreshed his memory from Janvier; that Ferriter, knowing that the cheering was for President Lincoln when Scott was set free, saw some one in the crowd whom he then thought, and after a lapse of time believed, to be the President.

But it is not so easy to dispose of the claim that President Lincoln was at the encampment on the night before.

Colonel Benedict, in his "correction," is supposed to have settled that question. He says that General Smith told him that President Lincoln never visited the encampment at Chain Bridge on the Scott business or for any other purpose. Now it should be noticed that General Smith was not encamped at Chain Bridge on September 8. He had moved to Camp Advance which was about a mile from the Virginia end of Chain Bridge on September 3. But supposing that by "Chain Bridge" General Smith had reference to either en-

campment (for a distance of a mile or two is a small matter), even then it is evident that General Smith was mistaken. In the *Green Mountain Freeman* of September 18, 1861, is a letter from some one who signs as D.M.M. of Company F, Third Vermont, dated at Camp Advance, September 12, 1861. It reads:

> Day before yesterday the President, accompanied by Gen. McClellan and Staff with a company of cavalry, was up to see what we were doing. We formed by the wayside and gave him three hearty cheers in passing and the President took off his hat in recognition. "Old Abe" is not the handsomest man I ever saw, but he has pleasant and searching eyes.

The *Orleans Independent Standard* (also a Vermont newspaper), in its issue of September 27, 1861, contains a letter from T. Abel Chase, which is dated at Camp Advance, September 11, 1861. It reads in part:

> Yesterday we were visited by the President, his cabinet in part, some of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives and others of the good people of Washington. I'll try to give you a description of the troupe. First came General McClellan and his guard, followed by a company of cavalry; next the President and troupe, followed also by another company of cavalry. The President did not seem at all afraid to shake hands and converse with the soldiers. It would have done you good to have been here and heard the salutes and cheers given in honor of "Honest Abe."

Now this could hardly be classed as anything but a visit of President Lincoln to the encampment. If General Smith

had forgotten this spectatular visit of the President on September 10, may he not in the lapse of thirty years have forgotten a quiet visit of the President on the evening of September 8, 1861?

Moreover, Mr. Chittenden, without giving definite dates, makes it clear that President Lincoln visited the encampment and talked with Scott. And now that this historian who was so unmercifully belabored by Doctor Barton has been vindicated on two important points in this controversy, as we have already seen, may it not be permissible to give him a little further consideration?

To be sure no one would accept the entire Chittenden narrative as authoritative history. Chittenden himself did not claim it as such. His daughter, Mrs. Richards, in a personal letter states: "Of course my father colored his narrative with his imagination. Any person with half an eye can see that. But in the introduction to the chapter in his book he says, 'I think I can guarantee the general accuracy of the facts.' He made a beautiful, readable, and touching story out of the prosaic material of the essential facts, just as any poet might do."

It would hardly seem possible for a man of known integrity, as Mr. Chittenden certainly was, to have made up the story of President Lincoln's visit to the encampment. And then to have his story corroborated, not perfectly, to be sure, but to a considerable extent, by the contemporaneous evidence contained in Captain Randall's letter of September 10, 1861 — a letter which Doctor Barton never saw — certainly gives us something to think about.

Mr. E. L. Smith, in the letter from which I quoted in the last preceding section, states that Captain Thompson told him that while he (Thompson) "did not see President Lincoln when he came to camp late at night, he heard of it in the morning and believed it to be a fact."

On the other hand, the skeptic might say that there is no clearly authoritative evidence that anybody actually saw President Lincoln at the encampment on the evening of September 8. He might say that the probability is that somebody, on learning of the President's personal attention to the matter, including his visit to General McClellan to order Scott's pardon, made a statement concerning that call upon General McClellan which was interpreted as a call upon General Smith at the encampment. The skeptic might also say, as I have just said with reference to the probability of Mr. Lincoln's visit to the encampment at the time set for Scott's execution, that the matter had been attended to and that there was no excuse for the President taking that needless journey.

At the same time it cannot be denied that such an action would have been quite characteristic of Abraham Lincoln. He had given an order to General McClellan — the man who felt himself so superior to the President. May he not have thought it best to follow the matter up in order to be sure that his order was respected? If the telegraph didn't work, how better could the President be satisfied than to make the trip himself? William Scott's life was in peril, and Abraham Lincoln had promised to see the matter through.

The reader of this discussion is free to make his own conclusion. Frankly, I do not believe that we shall ever know for a certainty, unless some scrap of diary or other personal record made by Mr. Lincoln comes to light when his personal papers, now sealed, are opened in the year 1947.

V

Before this discussion is brought to a close, I wish to call attention to the general tone of Colonel Benedict's "correction." It should be remembered that when he wrote

Vermont in the Civil War Colonel Benedict told the story of the Sleeping Sentinel as he then understood the facts of the case. Having been corrected by General Smith, Colonel Veasey, Chaplain Parmelee, and others, he accepted their recollections of events which transpired thirty years earlier — events on which, as we have seen, they had imperfect knowledge — without any additional research or attempt at verification on his part. He not only condemned Janvier's and Chittenden's versions of the pardon story, but also repudiated his own previous story except that part which held that Scott had been on picket duty for two nights in succession.

Granting that both Janvier and Chittenden made use of poetic license, even then there is little excuse for Benedict's carelessly-prepared "correction." Take for example the following:

> The letter-writers said that he was the first man that fell; that he received six bullets in his body; that his comrades caught him up and, as his life blood ebbed away, he raised to heaven amid the din of the battle, the cries of the dying, and the shouts of the enemy, a prayer for President Lincoln; saying for himself that he was no coward and was not afraid to die. They added that a smile of gratitude, brought by the thought of Mr. Lincoln's mercy, in his dying moments still illuminated the pale face of his corpse as the burial party laid him, shrouded in his blue coat and army blanket, in a soldier's grave under a clump of cherry trees in full bloom by the banks of the Warwick.

Colonel Benedict implies that this description of the death and burial of William Scott, which evidently was taken from

the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, is a gross exaggeration. But, pray, just how much of an exaggeration is it?

At the outset let it be admitted that the first statement may be questionable. Perhaps William Scott was not the first man to fall in that unequal struggle. It is a significant fact, however, that the statement to that effect in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* is corroborated by the special correspondent of the *New York Tribune*,[2] as follows: "Among the foremost across the creek, and the first to be killed yesterday, was this very man, as brave a soldier as ever died on the field of battle."

Secondly, it is claimed that Scott had six bullets in his body. On this point we have some authentic information. Two comrades of Scott from Groton, Vermont, Charles Emery and George Philbrook, one of whom helped Scott off the field, in letters written on the third day after the battle stated that Scott had five bullets in his body. But the reporter whom Benedict ridicules said there were six! What an exaggeration!

Thirdly, it is claimed that as his comrades helped Scott off the field he raised to heaven a prayer for President Lincoln. Benedict answers this by quoting the surgeon, Doctor Janes, as saying that Scott fell into a semi-conscious state and was in no condition to deliver orations or offer prayers. Let me ask if Doctor Janes forded Warwick River with those four companies that made that heroic charge? Did he follow William Scott all the way over and back in order to make sure that he did not pray for the President? Scott received five bullets, but during the time which elapsed between the reception of that first bullet and the final slump into the comatose state, Scott would have had opportunity to pray, not only for the President, but also for the Vice-president and "all others in authority" if he had so desired. It was some

time before Doctor Janes saw Scott, and I submit that the comrades who were near him and helped him off the field had better knowledge of what he said in his last moments of consciousness than did Doctor Janes.

Fourthly, it is said that "the smile of gratitude, brought by the thought of Mr. Lincoln's mercy, in his dying moments still illuminated the pale face of his corpse as the burial party laid him, shrouded in his blue coat and army blanket, in a soldier's grave under a clump of cherry trees in full bloom by the banks of the Warwick." How far away from the truth is this statement?

We have already observed the statement in the autobiography of Dr. Seth N. Eastman — a statement written with no idea of corroborating the description of Scott's burial, in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, or of offering aid to one or another side in a controversy. He says: "I helped to lay them to rest" (William Scott and another comrade). "I remember how peaceful they looked as we wrapped them in their overcoats and blankets and placed them in their shallow graves."

Fifthly, as to Scott having been buried in a soldier's grave, an examination of contemporary newspapers[3] will disclose the fact that the Vermont dead at Lee's Mill were buried on ground used by the Revolutionary fathers as a burial place during the siege of Yorktown.

And finally, what of the cherry trees? Let us again recall the letter of George Philbrick, the friend and comrade of Scott. Philbrick was no poet and was therefore not inclined to exaggerate. He says: "I did not see him after he was killed, but I saw where he was buried in a peach grove. The trees were all blossomed out, and it was a beautiful place." No, indeed, Philbrick was no poet; but his description is quite as full of color as is that of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

The chief difference between the two descriptions is that one says the blossoms were peach, while the other says they were cherry!

Again, the accuracy of Colonel Benedict's "correction" may be tested by the following paragraph which has reference to his treatment of the Scott incident in *Vermont in the Civil War:*

> I had not the slightest doubt of the truth of the story and wrote it up in my best style, taking the details largely from a letter written at the time by Capt. F. V. Randall of the Second Vermont Regiment, in which he gave the circumstances of Scott's death and burial as described by a war correspondent of the *New York Commercial Advertiser,* who claimed to have been an eye witness of the transaction.

What are the real facts? The letter of Captain Randall which Colonel Benedict mentions is obviously the letter to the *Green Mountain Freeman,* which I reproduced early in this work and to which I have repeatedly referred. It was written, not at the time of Scott's death, as Benedict states, but at the time of his pardon. The article in the *New York Commercial Advertiser* upon which, according to Benedict, Randall based his letter, was written some seven months later at the time of Scott's death. Furthermore, the article in the *New York Commercial Advertiser,* published at the time of Scott's death, was not written by a correspondent who was an eye witness. It was copied from the article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of April 21, 1862 — an article to which I have also repeatedly referred. There is, therefore, *not one accurate statement* in the foregoing paragraph taken from Colonel Benedict's "correction."

In considering the "correction" as a whole, it must be said that its only value lies in the fact that it clearly informs us that General Smith did not intend that Scott should suffer the death penalty. But a careful reading of the official pardon would give us the same information. Colonel Benedict does, however, explain the seeming inflexibility of General Smith which fooled not only Scott and his comrades, but Chittenden and Lincoln as well. General Smith wished to give the brigade a much-needed scare. For making this point clear, let Colonel Benedict have due credit.

I have dwelt at length on Colonel Benedict's "correction" not for the purpose of discrediting him as an historian in the broad sense of the term. He did a great service for the state of Vermont, for which his name should be held in honor. This "correction" pertaining to the Sleeping Sentinel is not a fair sample of his work. Knowing the tendency of many writers on historical subjects to exaggeration and romance, and believing Chittenden, Janvier, and himself guilty of this offense, he accepted without verification the imperfect knowledge of General Smith and others in whom he had the utmost confidence, as the truth and the whole truth. Then, in a confused state of mind, like that of a chastised infant, he tried to explain how it all happened.

Rather, I have dwelt at length on this "correction" because of the importance attached to it in the late controversy. As has been stated, Doctor Barton took refuge behind it as an absolutely safe defense after he had been driven from one position to another; and the editorial writer in the *Boston Herald* characterized it as a "positively conclusive document." On what foundations of sand will the so-called "debunkers" of history build their houses!

It has been said, and will be said again, that Scott would have been pardoned anyway, even if President Lincoln had

not interfered and ordered his pardon. We do not know. The matter rested with General McClellan. What General McClellan would have done when requested by General Smith is a matter of conjecture; what he *did* when ordered by President Lincoln is a matter of certainty.

And now, after many years, a monument has been erected near the birthplace of William Scott. And the workman who fashioned the inscription made no mistake when he carved the words, PARDONED BY ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

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[1]*Barre Daily Times*, Aug. 21, 1926.

[2]April 21, 1862.

[3]*Green Mountain Freeman*, April 23, 1862.

BY WALDO F. GLOVER

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

AND THE

SLEEPING SENTINEL

OF

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Seventy-five years ago a young Vermonter, William Scott, tramped down to Montpelier from Groton and enlisted in the 3rd Vermont Regiment. Five weeks later whilst his regiment was encamped in a stragetic position at Chain Bridge guarding the city of Washington, the officer-of-the-day on his early morning rounds discovered young Scott asleep at his post. Scott was arrested, brought before a court-martial, adjudged guilty and, offering no witnesses and no defense, was condemned to death. On September 9th he was stood before a firing squad, only to be saved at the last hour by pardon. A year later Scott was killed in action at the gallant charge of the Vermonters at Lee's Mills. Today a monument for Scott stands in his home town of Groton.

Such is the brief account of the Sleeping Sentinel. Yet it is a tale now become one of the most romantic and hydra-headed of the many told around the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln, for it was at Lincoln's interference that Scott was pardoned. Mr. Francis Janvier became famous overnight for his stirring poem on the subject; dozens of others from Benedict to John Drinkwater have published versions of this incident perhaps minor in the military annals but in personalities so important and interesting.

The war had only begun: Scott was the first soldier to be so condemned, as an example to others. Yet there were, Scott's comrads knew, extenuating circumstances. They petitioned for mercy. Lucius Chittenden, Register of the Treasury, and probably others pleaded with Lincoln. Lincoln acted. Scott was pardoned. The papers aroused themselves over the incident and ever since has raged a great controversy as to the exact part Lincoln played in the drama.

In 1925 William Barton, Lincoln authority, disputed the entire tale, calling it a myth and but the fabrication of men's fancy. This refired the controversy and for months the press was again full of it. A vast tidal wave of bitterness and skepticism rose. Men sprang to defend the story. In the end Barton, after acknowledging he was somewhat in error, retired and left the field to Waldo Glover and those who with him knew that Abraham Lincoln had been appealed to by Chittenden and by officers of the regiment, and did in fact cause a pardon to be granted William Scott.

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